The Righteous Death of an Honorable Man

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/50242345.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter, Minor or Background Relationship(s)
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham's Father, Jack Crawford, Beverly Katz, Alana Bloom, Minor Characters, Barney Matthews, Freddie Lounds
Additional Tags:	Hannibal Lecter is a Cannibal, Time Skips, Slow Burn, Light Angst, Will Grahams Childhood, Morally Ambiguous Will Graham, Love at First Sight, Mutual Pining, Temporarily Unrequited Love, Will Graham Has Encephalitis, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper, Cajun/creole Will Graham, Phone Sex, possible dubcon, Alternate Universe - Different First Meeting, ParkRanger!Will Graham, Minor Character Death
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-09-21 Updated: 2024-09-22 Words: 62,281 Chapters: 9/10

The Righteous Death of an Honorable Man

by snaccthesnacc

Summary

A young Will Graham meets a young Hannibal Lecter at a fish market in New Orleans. They become fascinated with each other. Nineteen years later a new killer makes his appearance in Will's National park, forcing Will to work alongside the FBI to figure out who's leaving behind these human artworks.

To Nurture a Young Man

Chapter Notes

I would like a special thank you to my Beta, Dysphoria (Starr_Dustt_Dysphoria)!

Disclaimer! I am not from New Orleans so sorry to anyone who is. Im also not a fisherman. Ive never held a fishing rod in my life lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“She knew the years of isolation had altered her behavior until she was different from others, but it wasn’t her fault she’d been alone. Most of what she knew, she’d learned from the wild. Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would.”

Delia Owens , *Where the Crawdads Sing.*

When Will was eight, his mother left him in a run down apartment in Baton Rouge with his dad and the clothes on his back. His dad only smiled, and went back to sitting hunched over on the dining table making lures.

When Will was ten, his dad brought him to work repairing boat motors in New Orleans, where Will talked to fishermen about what fish ate what, and spoke to their wives to find out what bird sang what.

When Will was eleven, his dad handed him a wrench and told him to “get to it”. After school he would go and work in that boatyard till his fingers were stained black, just like the rocks that lined the river basin. Sometimes he worked past his dad, so the man could catch a catfish for them to fry up at home. They would eat blackened cod with blackened fingers, ignoring the third chair at the table.

When Will was twelve, his dad moved them into the outskirts of New Orleans, into an old house made in the 1800s, just off of the bobcat trails. It was dark yellow and smelled like turpentine, planted next to wisteria trees, sitting right across from an old bog. It didn't have air conditioning, and so on summer nights, Will and his dad would crack open a window,

smell the muggy swamp, and close their eyes while the frogs sang them lullabies. That same year, his dad came home and handed him his very own fishing rod.

Will spent his free time in lakes, rivers, and marshes, memorizing animal's paths and behaviors. Sometimes he'd lose time, staying out so long until his dad screamed at him from the bay. Sometimes, when his dad went out to drink with old drinking buddies, he would venture further into the bayou, where the only thing he could hear was the humming of bugs. Sometimes he swore he could hear the sun, humming and crying out to him. Sometimes he heard the moon, cooing and shushing him as he trudged along the water. Sometimes, when he was deep in the marsh and possibly lost, he could hear his mother's voice calling him down for supper.

The kids at school didn't hate him, but they didn't like him. He was weird, scrawny, and reeked of motor oil. His dark brown curls had lost their shape, resulting in a large mop on the top of his head. His glasses, which were far too big for him, hung low on his nose, the frames a thin metal because they were the only ones his dad's insurance covered. There at school he was invisible. They walked past him, ignored him, and avoided him. During lunchtime he ate the fish his dad packed, all alone and quietly. He never bothered anyone, and seemed content in his own mind.

When Will was fourteen he picked up a true crime book and read it all through lunch, huddled in the corner wearing his dad's hand-me-downs. The book went over why some killed, how some killed, and just what kind of people they went for. When one of his science partners saw it in his backpack, a new rumor spread about that there was a killer out in the marsh, who looked a lot like Will Graham, and hid bodies in the bogs, or sometimes ate them.

Will didn't take it to heart. He knew that when he got home, he would go out deep into the water and have the comfort of the sun, who kissed his cheeks and left him pink; He'd have the moon, whose song allured lightning bugs to dance around him like a thousand suns; and he'd have his mother, to tell him "I Love You".

<u>New Orleans, July 24th, 1994.</u>

Lake Pontchartrain fed into two other lakes, Lake Maurepas and Lake Borgne. They hosted a plethora of both saltwater and freshwater fishes, and a whole lot of other critters. Will Graham, then freshly out of high school, knew all about these lakes. He knew not to fish in the alligator bend of Lake Borgne, and also knew Jones Island– the delta of Lake Maurepas– was prone to flooding during hurricane season, which if being honest, was half the year. He

knew that fishing off River's Ridge, just west of the city, yielded no catches 'cause other fishermen started using corn, which rendered the area useless. The thing about corn is that carp come flying to you before you can even understand what just happened. Some call it cheating, others say it's fair; Will didn't give two shits, but he avoided the area anyways. His knowledge of the ecosystem, and the aid of his own lures, awarded him as the best fisherman in the French market. This allowed him a steady flow of income alongside his help with his dad's motorboat repairs. Since then, he saved up for college where he'd be attending George Washington University in DC that fall.

Will Graham was planning on studying Criminology and Criminal Justice. He was able to envision the mind of a predatory animal while wade fishing, like a gator, sneaking around and moving side to side till it finally stilled, sat, and waited for the fish to come. This skill pretty much translated over to humans. While Will read books upon books of serial killers, cold cases, and overall basic crime stories, he could envision them, see them, view upon what their mind created as art. Only all of them were rather tasteless, vulgar, classless, and overall careless. No killer had struck out in his mind as meaningful. Will wanted to honor the dead, because if one was to end an innocent life, why not thank them for all they gave you? He especially held this belief whenever he went fishing or hunting, making sure their death was humane, fast, and honorable. When it comes to humans, they carry sin, so honor can vary. But for God's innocent creatures, they hold no sin, and so they deserve a death kinder than man. Will wanted to ensure that every tasteless, honorless killer was served justice. What about those who did honor their kills? Will didn't quite have an answer to that.

Will kept this in his mind as he felt a tug on his line where he stood, a foot deep in mud. The sun casted down on him as he pulled, giving him that same comforting hug he knew when he was a young child. With some strain, a few minutes later he reeled in a beautiful redfish. The bull was a staggering weight, not something you typically fish in July but in the peak of September. Will sucked in a breath as he calculated how much he could sell him for, before lifting him up unto his cooler which rested twenty feet away on the bed of his old red chevy C/K.

"Heading downtown, Will?" questioned Cleetus, an older African-American man who Will often fished with, and lived next to. He was around seventy, heavyset, but had the kindest face Will ever saw. He often picked Will up from school before he got his Chevy, and took him to his home where his wife, Sharleen, made some Bananas Foster for him to indulge in. It reminded him of his mother's. They never judged Will's dad being a single father, nor did they coddle him; they merely lent a helping hand whenever they could. Will was always grateful, and his dad often gave them free boat repairs– essential to their lifestyle.

“Yeh, might make a pretty penny off’a this one.” Will grinned. Cleetus whistled low and smiled at Will.

“Tell me, when you get back buy me some crawfish, making a boil tomorrow. I'll pay ‘ya back.” Cleetus continued. Will grunted as he slammed the rusted truck bed closed. He squinted at Cleetus, wiping down his glasses.

“Don't worry ‘bout it, on the house.” He replied with a wave. Cleetus giggled as Will got in his truck and started it up, twisting the keys after a few failed attempts before her engine roared to life with great beauty. Will hollered loud as he sped off, leaving behind a blooming cloud of dust, laughing as Cleetus smirked and threw his hat after the truck.

Will drove through the foliage, rolling down the window as the local news played. As it rambled on about current weather conditions, traffic, and an angry call-in about the amount of piss in the streets, Will looked at the Spanish moss that fell from each tree. He stayed reminiscing about his childhood and enjoying the scent of New Orleans– which depending on what area could be the sweetness of the earth– or as the call in said– piss. The scenery blurred past him, and he started to wonder how DC will be, noting that in a few months he will be truly alone. Because even when his dad was gone or Cleetus had to leave for a few nights, he never was truly alone. The wild nurtured him, it sang him to sleep and woke him up with its calls, and Will wasn't favorable to the city life; even here, he didn't spend too long in the heart of New Orleans. He thanked his marshes once again as the sunlight beamed through the leaves, leaving the sweet taste of honey in his mouth.

Growing up, such an active life gifted Will a toned and strong body; the amount of fish he ate left his hair silky, each curl delicately framing his face and neck where they curled up. To Will, it just looked messy. His glasses finally fit his face, his new pair with frames of thin brown, and his jaw had filled out. He grew to five foot nine(ten if he was feeling frisky), not as tall as his dad, but it was proportional. He finally started to fill out his dad’s clothes, leaving him looking like a rugged working man. A few girls in school even asked him out. Will debated on if he should, but ultimately decided he didn’t have the time. Will thought about them as he signaled for a left turn.

He pulled into his usual parking spot, which sat right under some hickory which supplied shade so his leather seats wouldn't burn him. It was only seven, and the market didn't open for another hour, so he took his time in pulling down the cooler from the back. He was still wearing his muddy boots and his dad’s work shirt that used to be two shades lighter. He rolled up the sleeves, exposing muscular forearms and light body hair, as well as an old watch

on his left wrist. He wasn't the scrawny marsh boy he used to be, and grateful he was as he hauled the cooler over to a stand just next to a few other vendors who admired his catches. It started heating up as the sun rose higher, causing sweat to drip off his hair and his glasses to fog up. The French Market was teeming with different men selling all sorts of crustaceans, fishes, small game, and even on the rare occasion, gator. More uptown, vendors sold jewelry, crafts, and other homemade goods, like homemade butter or a silk scarf. Will took note to head over and buy something nice for Sharleen before he leaves this fall. He sighed as he took out the bull, he fixed the scales, ready to sell it to the nearest vendor so he could go back to fixing motors. His dad must have woken by then, probably brewed some coffee before he scrambled some eggs–

“What is the cost of that fish?” Will turned around and stood facing a taller, young man with dark blond hair neatly parted to its side. He wore a light dress top, neatly tucked into black slacks and pressed against a dark leather messenger bag. The outfit wasn’t the most expensive, but he put it together so well Will wouldn’t doubt him for a second if he said it was Chanel. He looked like one of those men you'd see on the front of a Times Magazine. He glanced up once, memorizing the man's features before ultimately dropping eye contact and held in a breath. The man was no doubt handsome, with strong cheekbones and an even sharper jaw. His lips were delicate, but his eyes were that of a hunter. The foreign accent was left ringing in his ears. Will knew he found some men attractive, a secret he would take to his grave, but this man was just straight up gorgeous. Will awkwardly, and shamefully, looked at his clock— 7:45 the time read— he nipped his lip.

“I'm sorry, we're not open yet,” he muttered as the man raised his eyebrows. Will shifted his gaze to the brown rim of his glasses, feeling exposed, and a little ashamed to look so… worn next to this man who no doubt dry cleans all of his clothes… he cleared his throat and tried to weakly smile as an apology.

“I am aware,” the man fixed his cuffs, his accent – Eastern European? – thick and heavy, “ however, that fish you brought in is one of the most beautiful I've seen here, and I would like to purchase it before anyone else. So what is the cost?”

Will looked around at the vendors, then down at his fish. He admired it where its fins were splayed out on the ice, so fresh it almost looked like it could jump right back into the water. Killed – no – Honored, just this morning. Will looked at the man finally, curious as to what this man planned to do with his catch,

“What are you going to do with it?” Will found himself asking, a small smile tugged at the man's lip, curling over sharp teeth.

“Bouillabaisse, I plan to purchase the mussels from the man with the yellow boots,” the man replied, looking down the row of stalls at the aforementioned vendor. Will peered over, spotting the fisherman, and winced.

“I wouldn't recommend that guy, yellow-boots there tends to mix his day olds with his fresh. Mr. Pierce–” he pointed over to where Mr. Pierce started setting up shop just left of him, “ – always has fresh ones.” The man gave a satisfied smirk, and Will couldn't help but smile back, “I'll give it to ya’ for fifty.”

“How can I trust that this fish is impeccable? What if you also sell old fish?” asked the man with a straight face, but the lightness in his tone let Will know he was only teasing. The man could smell that the fish was caught not an hour before, but loved as Will allowed pride to swell at the base of his throat as he leaned forward, pressing into the ice, noting how the man's eyes widen a fraction,

“I'm the best fisherman in this whole damn market.” he started, “I know everything there is to know about fishing. I make my own lures and I don't cut corners. Woke up at four a.m. just to catch this beauty,“ He swallowed and looked directly into his eyes, perhaps about to admit something too raw, “I don't kill to kill, I honor each fish.”

“And how do you do that?”

Will felt he’d regret being so open with the man, but he couldn't help it, he sort of saw himself in the black of his pupils,

“I make them a spectacle, allow for us to appreciate them in a way they never were,” He knew he's not just talking about fish anymore, and he discerns the man's eyes have darkened. It was silent for a moment, before he heard the man let out an exasperated breath and he handed Will a stack of cash from his messenger bag. It wasn't fifty, but eighty. Will stared, before he shook his head and began to apologize for his brash behavior,

“Hannibal.” The man looked deeply at Will.

“Hannibal?” Will gulped as he pocketed the cash, slowly moving to grab parchment to wrap up the fish. They stared at each other for a moment, noting how the cologne the man wears

smells like something of a good dream. He thought about the lightning bugs, he thought about his mom.

“My name,” Will cursed for acting stupid, pausing the fish wrapping and held out his hand,

“Will, Will Graham.” Hannibal kept a stoic face as he firmly shook Will's hand, how cold it was, surely due to being up so early in the water. He also felt callouses, rough and rigid. Not so different from his owm. Though they derive from very different activities.

“So…Bouillabaisse, french, You're not french are you?” Hannibal watched as Will tied the fish with string, and continued for him,

“No, I've spent the past few years in Italy, but I am Lithuanian,” he grabbed the fish from Will, “Do you speak French, Will?”

“Creole-French, but yeah, I do,” Will paused, noting Hannibal doesn't have a cooler as he reached for his own, “Voulez-vous utiliser ma glacière?” Hoping the French would impress, as corny as it made him feel.

“Oui, s’il vous plaît. Et merci.” It’s Will's turn to grin, as he handed Hannibal his cooler with his fish in it, “Perhaps I can bring it to you tomorrow? Would you be at the same location?” Will nodded,

“I’ll be here to buy some mussels, planning a stew for tomorrow. My dad likes it,” Hannibal gave a questioning look to Will,

“How old are you? And I hope that doesn’t intrude-”

“No you’re fine it's-” Will interjected, “Sorry- I didn't mean to cut ya’ off- I'm eighteen, I go to DC this fall... for college…” Hannibal gave him a pleasant smile as he clutched the cooler closer,

“Ah, I too will be in Maryland, I was given a scholarship to John Hopkins for Medical School.” They looked at each other a second more, Hannibal shifting his bag, “ I am Twenty-Four, if you care,” Will felt even more awkward now that he's face to face with a soon to be doctor, a stunning soon to be doctor.

“Wow, that's...” he rubs the back of his neck, “-really cool. My dad and I fix boat motors,”

“Hm, a handyman, I plan to be a surgeon, so I guess we have ‘skilled-fingers’ as a common trait,” Will blushes at how that sounded, but the older man gives no indication if he noticed, “Well Mr. Graham, it has been lovely but I must go, but I shall see you tomorrow. À bientôt.”

Will watched as Hannibal walked through the market, excitement running in his veins. He made a dull note to get the crawfish, as he too, made his way through the market.

That night Will ate ham sandwiches with his dad on the porch. Will thought about the man he met. He thought about how his fingers felt in his palm. He thought about his perfect hair– touched his own rat's nest– and replayed every moment of it. He thought about the kids in middle school. He thought about Cleetus. He thought about his mom. He thought about how he'll be alone this fall. His dad looked at him a bit longer as Will stared into the distance. A moth flew near them. His dad sighed, rubbed his temple, and reached over the hand-made bench to pull Will closer. He held him close, the scent of motor oil clinging to his skin. His thumb stroked the base of Will's neck. Yellow Porch light casted down at them’

“I love you, son” Will swallowed his mouthful of white bread. He leaned in, allowing himself to breathe in the scent of home.

“I love you too, dad”

That night, as Will's dad left in his own dark blue Astro van, he went into his dads office. He sat in front of their shared fishing box. Amongst the string, bait, and overall junk, he saw the Lure he made his dad for his fiftieth birthday, next to it stood his lucky lure, calling out to him. He pulled back his lucky lure, green and red with a speckled back– messy from unskilled hands– but attracted fish like no other. He thought about the man in which he really

had no idea if he'll ever see again after tomorrow. He put the lure in his pocket, closed the lid, and turned off all the lights in the kitchen. He headed to bed.

That night, Hannibal laid in not the most auspicious bed, fitted with a royal green bedspread, and itchy white pillows. No it wasn't Italy, but Louisiana had its charm. He was interested in the French cuisine that could be found there, wishing to study creole dishes. And that he did. He got up, made his way to the inn's small kitchen provided at an extra cost, and looked at the pot where he cooked the Bouillabaisse. He moves back into his room, finding his leather bag hanging on the back of the desk chair. He reached into his messenger bag and pulled out an old sketchbook. He flipped through multiple medical diagrams, Italian architecture, and his sister. He paused on that page, before ripping out a blank one, picking up his charcoals, sitting down on the desk in the corner of the room, and began to draw.

That night, as Hannibal drew scratches into the page, erasing small smudge, he made sure to have one final message for Will before his departure:

"Come find me."

<u>New Orleans, July 25th, 1994.</u>

Hannibal makes his way down to the Old French Market, it's a quarter till eight but Hannibal has no doubt the young man will be there already. The man he met had struck him as something so superb and unique, Hannibal couldn't help but smile to himself at the thought of seeing his beauty once more. He straightened his charcoal coloured tie, noting that it may be too hot today, before untying it and dropping it back. He looks over at the cleaned and empty cooler on the side of his rental car. He had planned to kill that night and use the rude manager of the inn he was staying at in place of fish, but the beauty in the fish that young man caught changed his mind. Not only that, but the way Will Graham looked at that fish was a sight Hannibal could never forget.

After all, who else would see his killings as art? As Hannibal had stared into the soul of Will Graham, he could only see, in the great white that lay there, himself looking back. Of course, he wasn't sure of himself yet, but the way the boy with such fervor laid bare the honor he took in his hunt made Hannibal so entranced by him. He knows art, he appreciates my work. Hannibal had just spent the past few Years studying in Italy, where he made his first 'Artworks', deeming himself 'Il Mostro di Firenze'. Though Monster had an ill ring attached

to it, Hannibal much preferred ‘artista’, but such a class would never be recognized by the common man. At least, not until Will Graham. He peered out the window and saw a man walking into the french market, just as unruly as yesterday. He had such an innocence, it reminded Hannibal of those paintings of Greek gods; delicate, yet so refined and muscular with a glow as if the heavens themselves touched it. He got out of the car, grabbing the cooler and his bag while ensuring he looked presentable as he headed to the curly haired man.

“Good morning,” Will walked up to meet Hannibal after he caught a glimpse of him. Hannibal handed him the cooler, to which Will thanked him and the two fell into an odd silence, “Are ya’ free today?” Will appears to be looking over at something in the horizon, and Hannibal can tell he's nervous. He grinned at the young man's southern drawl, before announcing,

“I am. Is there something you would like to do?” Will took off his glasses and cleaned them on his white T-shirt, purposely avoiding eye contact. Hannibal merely smiled at Will, not able to hold back his own curiosity. He wiped his hand on his blue jeans, before asking,

“Wanna’ fish with me?”

And so, after they enjoyed some fresh baked bread -No doubt Hannibals was better, of course- and Will purchased his mussels, Hannibal found himself riding shotgun in Wills vintage Chevy, noting the scent of turpentine and cardamom. The mussels are in that same cooler as before, stacked deep into ice so Will assures him they won't go bad. A few packs of gum lined the side door, and Hannibal also noted a few old wrappers of candy. Hannibal sniffed the air-chocolate. The gentleman has yet to be familiar with many American brands. Will, unsure how or why Hannibal trusted him, continued to drive in silence to his dads Boatyard. Hannibal didn't smell any discomfort off of Will, and simply laid his head back and enjoyed the ride.

“How long are you staying out here?” Will inquired. He rolled down his window, before reaching over Hannibal's lap to twist down the handle to roll down the passenger side. Will's shirt rode up, exposing the V line that connected to the brown leather belt he wore. His curls lay rested against his entrancing eyes. Hannibal ignores the proximity,

“Tomorrow morning is my last time here, but I've made plans for that.” Will tried to ignore the small sting that gave him, instead humming in acknowledgment and turning on the local stations. Disappointment settles like a stone in his stomach. He tuned the dusty radio until smooth and steady jazz plays. Hannibal hummed in content, while Will drove him to god knows where. Will passed the familiar oaks and houses he's seen all his life, he passed the highschool where he’d just got his diploma, he tried to ignore the twenty-four year old who’s watching his every move. They pulled into his dads place, and Will made a mental note to where exactly his dad is and the best route to avoid him. The boatyard was just outside a river bend, and it's where Will spent his young days floating about the water. Wisterias cover half the yard, their purple petals floating in the wind like butterflies. Hannibal notes the scent of Motor Oil and …Will. The scent of Will was very strange, indeed unlike the common man. He smelled like a deep forest, an oaky scent that Hannibal only smells when it's spring and the morning dew has yet to settle. Of course, there's the scent of motor oil, but that only adds more charm to the man. He smelled like every childhood memory, like a warm breeze, like sweet carnations. No cologne could ever compare to the scent that is Will Graham. Hannibal bites his tongue as he allows himself to be absorbed in the fragrance.

“This is the boatyard I work at,” Will slurred ‘is’ into the other words. Hannibal saw the old weathered sign ‘Boat Repair’ just above what he assumed is the office, an old weathered hut with red railings leading up to a plantation style porch, “My dad’s here, but don't try to talk to him… I don't wanna explain who you are. He’s skeptical to... strangers…” Hannibal merely nodded, shifting his bag to his side and taking it all in

“Are you ashamed of me?” He asked sarcastically, “Not good enough for ‘daddy’?”

Will rolled his eyes and smiled before countering in a fake melancholic tone, “No doll, he's just traditional,” really honing in on the southerness of his accent. He unbuckled himself and leaned into the red seat cover.

As they exit, Hannibal pleased himself in Will's small laughter, and moved to stand next to him, walking and ignoring the way Will's pronunciation of ‘doll’ tickled something in his brain. Will brought them to an old storage locker just next to the office, passing puddles of oil covered in those lavender petals. It's a jubilant scene as Will cursed to himself trying to unjam the storage locker, Hannibal looked down at his tarnished dress shoes, “Here, take these boots. I can give you a… t-shirt incase you dont wanna’ get muddy…”

Hannibal pondered at the dark black rubber boots, before grabbing what he can assume is an old red novelty tee stained with what he hopes is oil. Hannibal rubbed a hand through his hair, messing up what little gel he decided to put on this morning. He noticed Will’s eyes follow his hand. An idea to carry on the joke struck him, so he took one step closer to Will, where his chin almost rests against the brunette’s ear, he can smell the carnations,

“Are you going to watch me change, darling?” he smiled, Will stuttered before turning beet red, promptly swiveling on his toes and giving Hannibal some privacy. Hannibal gave a mischievous laugh as dropped his bag and tugs the shirt on, noting how Will's scent engulfs him, along with his memories. He flattened out the old shirt, noticing there's text on it that reads ‘Master Baiter’. It didn't cross his mind as inappropriate, but he could sense Will's mischief. Will finished up tugging on his own twin pair of boots, and grabbed out two fishing rods. One last slam and a curse at the locker, he dragged Hannibal through the boatyard to an old motorboat sitting across what appears to be a homemade dock.

“My dads in the office, he's gonna leave at twelve for his night shift, he started up a new job downtown,” Will pointed out, before looking at his watch, “It’s nine right now,”

A comfortable silence ensued, the two men content in eachothers company as the younger one explained how to hitch a boat. They toss whatever bags and equipment they have into the boat before clambering in. The older man stood silent as Will rambled on about how his dad taught him, what his dad does, what his dad says, and how good of a man he is. He ended the ramble with a small ‘I love my dad,’. Hannibal wouldn’t know, he never cared for his parents. Though grateful they raised him, the only person he ever loved truly was his sister. He was unsure if that would stay the same, as they wade through purple and white speckled water. Will leaned back onto the wood edge, where the green boat rocked steadily against the current, reaching back to reveal a small radio. He slowly tuned it till music begins softly flowing around the men. The sun began to heat up the air, leaving the boys sweating as they went deeper into the marsh. After a few minutes of silence from both of them, broken from either a birds cry or loud static breaking up the station

“How was the fish?” Will spoke, a swarm of cranes began their summit across the maurepas swamp, Hannibal liked how they compliment the dark green water. He liked how that water compliments Will. Hannibal, void in every emotion God has gifted man, liked how Will looked against the trees. He also liked how Will's eyes squint in the sun. He liked how his lips were pink.

“Exquisite, a fine catch. A master of his art I dare say.” A master he was. The fish Hannibal had was flakey, juicy, and overall a great specimen. He kept thinking of Will as he ate each spoonful. He thanked Will with every swallow.

“Thank you,” Will has begun attaching the lures, sticking his tongue out in concentration, the pink just barely a sliver. He paused to wipe sweat off his brows, “kinda wished I could’ve tried it " he handed Hannibal a rod, the two men watching each other. Will finally looked away.

“I could detail how it tasted? Or how I had prepared it?” Hannibal adds, drawing one of his hands to his lap as he rubs against the fabric.

“How did you prepare it? And I don't mean the dish itself. I meant how did you cut my fish”, ‘My kill’ goes unsaid, but as Will settled closer to Hannibal finally looking into his eyes again, Hannibal understood.

“Honorably. I kept the head so I could preserve its character. I thanked it before I ate. I thanked you,” The older man began, Will leaned back, a few sparrows flew above. The radio played Fleetwood Mac.

“Do you always do that?” Will questioned, his eyebrows drawing close together. Hannibal stopped rubbing his thighs, instead using both hands to grip the rod Will watched.

“No. But it was a very special dish, and I was able to greet the man who made it possible, so it seemed fit. Why did you invite me here?”. They both leaned back. Hannibal lips exposed a sliver of sharp teeth. Will allowed himself to sit up swapping his rod into his other hand. Hannibal held his own like it's sacred.

“You seemed nice. Why’d you agree” Will pushed. If Hannibal wanted to play twenty-one questions, then so be it.

“You seemed nice. I don’t like rude people.” The twenty-four year old watched carefully as Will drew back his line, and threw it into the water. It left ripples that disturbed the petals floating on top. A frog croaked from somewhere west.

“I don’t either” chirped Will, who resumed his examination of his rod. Pools of green reflect against blue. Hannibal mimics Will's movement, having only fished once upon a time in Lithuania. He narrows his eyes, pressing his lip into a firm line, then continuing,

“What qualifies as rude to you?” The eighteen year old pauses all movements. His young face, laced with light stubble, faces Hannibal. Will thinks about the deer he saw with three bullet wounds, left for dead just a mile from here. He thinks about the dog hit by a car, left abandoned on the side of a road, its fur stained red while these very petals fell around it. They too once had mothers, they too once dreamt.

“Would you kill them?” Will had risen while he was lost in thought. He looked down onto Hannibal, registering what he just asked him. The sun made the older man's hair golden. The man simply stared back, allowing Will to soak him in.

Why that question did not strike him as odd probably explained exactly who Will was. He thought about the people who harmed those innocent creatures. The tasteless, classless, and cruel actions committed on those the most innocent. Even babies have the potential to sin, once they age. But animals? They simply follow instinct, they cannot do wrong. They deserve to die warm, happy, and honored. He imagined taking the life away from those cruel humans, justice. He liked it. He shouldn't. But he did and there is no use denying what he felt..

“I don’t know,” He lied, and by the way Hannibal tears his gaze away to smile at the ripples in the water, Will knew he saw right through him.

“You could’ve brought me out here to kill me, ” disclosed Hannibal, indifferent like it was a passing through, similar to asking himself what color tie he should wear with his suit.

“I could’ve. You could as well. Right now, no one will hear me scream,” Will sensed his psyche morphing into something else entirely. Becoming someone else. His vision narrowed onto him, as he took a step closer to him on the boat. He was more confident, the morphing

of his psyche proving soothing. Hannibal looked onward, with a darkness in his eyes he recognizes but can't quite place, “Would you Hannibal? Would you kill me?”

“No.” The dark blond scans him head to toe. He was dirty, sweaty, clumsy, young, and yet irresistible, “Would you kill me?”

“I don’t know,” Will turned to stare blankly at the waters, examining the river's bend. Fire burned deep in Hannibal's heart as he sat star struck, looking at possibly the only man in the world who saw him for who he was. Not a monster, not a killer. An artist. It was thrilling. Whether Will was ready or not, Hannibal had already sunk his fangs into him.

Hannibal couldn't help but feel resentment growing at the one way ticket to Maryland sitting on his nightstand.

“Tell me about your homemade lures.” Hannibal swapped the subject. As if snapped from a trance, Will shook his head, pulling out his glasses from his pocket while he rested the rod on his hip. He sat down next to the older man scooting close so they swt hip to hip, he hooked his rod onto the boat, reaching over to guide Hannibal's hands, spilling techniques and tricks. They stayed like that for hours, side by side, breathing each other's air. They laugh at each other's jokes, and argue over who gets the hat Will brought. Hannibal lost, but the damage was already done as Will's cheeks burned bright red.

By the time they finally felt a tug, or at least noticed it, it was past noon, Will's dad had left, the men too far out to be seen. With Will's arms wrapped around Hannibal, he reeled in a medium trout. They decided to spare it, Will decided it wasn't worth the effort of decimating it. Hannibal agreed, deeping it not a worthy candidate– or one that had offended him in any way.

The eighteen year old’s stomach growled, and they found themselves wading back, boarding the boat, running into the office to scramble about for whatever snacks Mr. Graham had laying around. It's less than ideal for Hannibal to be munching on ‘Trail Mix’ on a pleather couch while the younger man ruffled through paperwork beyond the kiosk, but he felt young, and alive. He looked down at his ‘Master Baiter’ shirt, debating whether to take that off now, or wait. Will speaks with food in his mouth, a trait Hannibal wishes he could stay and fix that behavior, but, ‘C'est comme ça’.

“Would you come back here at sundown? I want to show you something else.” Will sputtered in his smacking. The answer is simple, as Hannibal sets aside his packet.

“Yes.”

New Orleans, July 25th, 1994. 7:00 pm

Darkness engulfed the Motor Boat, only a bleak flashlight that Will held high to guide them. Unlike anybody else with a reasonable mind, Hannibal was not scared. He simply trusted Will as he brought the two of them over to an enclosing of trees.

“Careful for gators, they bite you.” Hannibal promptly folded his hands in, a precautionary measure. He looked at the vest Will has equipped himself with, all the different tools and pins on it. His hands were clammy, and every few seconds his throat gulped in nerves.

Hannibal himself had changed back into his dress shirt, returning Will's shirt and disheartened that his scent went with it. Will’s chuckle at the shirt made him think maybe it was for the best. Will stopped the boat moving away from the motor to sit down next to Hannibal, and looked into the deep water.

“Sometimes I hear my mothers voice out here.” he tilted his head up, “Sometimes the sun sings, I can hear its hum.”

“A hum?” Will nodded.

“It beckons everything else in the swamp to make noise, so it sings. The moon does too.” Hannibal reflected on this. He too is familiar with people describing things as singing, in fact, the way Will looked could be ‘singing’ to his soul. However, his mother's voice is an interesting remark. He's aware of his fathers presence, but had yet to hear about Will's mother,

“How young were you when she left?” Hannibal asked, checking “Maternal issues” into a mental list. Will paused, giving Hannibal a once over,

“How did you know she left? She could’ve died,”

“I meant it in an ambiguous way” silence stretched. Will strokes his chin, and Hannibal fixed his own collar. Awkwardness ensues.

“I was eight,”

“What did you feel?” Will gives Hannibal a disgraceful look as Hannibal kept a straight face. He quirked up an eyebrow, judging Hannibal.

“I thought you wanted to be a surgeon? Not a psychiatrist”.

“Both fields interest me deeply.” He inhaled softly, clasping his hands together, “ It’s interesting to be in the mind of someone else, no?”

“It’s hard.”

“By what means” Will huffed, searching for something in the reeds.

“I can enter the minds of others– empathy issues or something– It’s draining,” Hannibal raised an eyebrow, urging to explore this. If Will can enter minds, could he really see Hannibal for who he is? Not just a fleeting hope?

“Is that why you avoid eyes?” Will in retaliation looks dead straight to Hannibals face, “ They are known to be the windows to one’s soul,”

“I do actually need the glasses, near sighted..”

“Doesn't mean you can't use them to… block eyes.”

“Yeah I guess so… why did you leave Lithuania?” It was Hannibal this time who gave Will a tight grimace, before turning away

“It’s a complicated matter,” none of the men say a word. Steady breathing can be heard in between more frog croaks. Hannibal saw a light emerge from the bush and felt Will jump in excitement. He smelled Will's happiness, and regret.

“Its not one I like to talk about. This happened… can never be undone.

“I’m sorry” Will whispered.

“Do not worry over it, it is nothing that concerns you” Hannibal reassured, placing a hand on Will’s back. The scent of honey appeared for a quick second, and Hannibal savored it, “ for how could you have known it was a negative experience?”

In the midst of the night more light emerges from the Reeds, this time it's Will who pressed his hand into the small of Hannibal's back, where they both cradle each other.

“Fireflies?” Hannibal questioned.

“We call them lightning bugs,”

Hannibal accepted the correction, enjoying the knowledge of American culture, huddled closer to Will's side. Will could smell Hannibal's cologne. It smelled like— and to this thought Will was ashamed: sexy apple, for lack of better terms. It was still comforting like a good memory. His pulse began to race as he felt how close he was to Hannibal. Hannibal smelled honey again, a sudden encapsulating scent he wanted to pinpoint.

The lightning bugs lifted up around them, encasing them in new stars. Hannibal felt his bag nudge against his calf, reminding him of his drawing.

“I too hear the sun sing, in which I hear its hums. And the moon.” Will blinker, “ even in another country I see The birds sing me their songs.” Hannibal looked down into his bag which he had brought up to cradle in his lap, retracting his hand from Will's back, but made no effort to remove his own. “ I have something for you,” Will looked at Hannibal with anticipation, tracking him as he ruffled through his bag before pulling out a sheet of sketching paper. Will carefully grabbed it, leaving Hannibal saddens at the loss of where their skin used to touch.

Will saw the very marsh he grew up in displayed in charcoal. In the middle of the wisterias, is a single crane, carrying a green carnation. Will took note of all the details, the cattails, the frogs on a log, the flock of sparrows flying through the Spanish moss. He saw the ripples in the water, so life-like he's sure if he touches it his fingers will wet. “Figured you might like to have that as you go to Maryland this fall. Remind you of home. I most likely will never see you, though I am not too far.” That stings Will, but he's so engrossed at the gift he’ll worry about it later.

“It’s beautiful…” beautiful doesn't even begin to describe what Will felt as he looks at this art, maybe admiration? Astonishment? Love? Without taking his eyes away, Will slowly reaches into his pocket, where the green lure he put in last night still stands. His lucky lure, “Here,”

“A lure?” Hannibal delicately held the handmade tool, as Will kept looking at his gift,

“It’s the best one in my collection. In case you ever want to fish again. I liked this… I won't see you after tonight, will I?” Hannibal sulked, before lowering the paper Will grasps so he may look at his young face,

“Not tomorrow, but maybe someday. I will make sure of that.” Sadness washed over Will, the feeling of abandonment once again. He knew he's being foolish, but as he gazes into Hannibal's warm red eyes, he can let this feeling go. “I’ll look for you, and you will know.”

“À bientôt, Hannibal,”

“À bientôt, Will Graham,”

They smile and watch the Lightning bugs together. Neither of them believed in love at first sight, but after tonight they both changed their sentiments.

New Orleans, September 2nd, 1994

It's been 39 days since Hannibal Left, and 39 nights Will has dreamt of him. His painting lies packed alongside the rest of his valuables in the moving boxes. Will had just spent an entire supper surrounded by the people he loves before he leaves tomorrow. Cleetus and Sharleen bring their banana foster, Will promises to write to them. Will's Dad hugs his son very close, telling him to come visit. Will sails out to say goodbye to his mother one last time. However, deep in the marsh he no longer hears his mothers voice. No, in between the sun's cries and the moon's whispers, he can only hear Hannibal's accent through the brush, telling him to "come find me,". Will crosses his legs as he sits in the hull. He closes his eyes and tries not to cry. He doesn't know why he grew so attached to a man he's known for two days, he doesn't know why the tears stings his cheeks. He scrubs his face with his fingers, feeling the hard callous, and whispers,

"I'll find you."

Chapter End Notes

À bientôt is how to say goodbye to someone you wish to see again soon in french! (Or so im told.....)

Your Ghost

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU TO MY BETA Dysphoria (Starr_Dustt_Dysphoria)!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In college, Will lost his accent. Even though by technicalities he changed it himself, turns out the fastest way to get someone to look down on you is by having a slow southern drawl. His peers took him for an idiot, regardless of his remarkable stance as a student. White trash. He once again went back to being a nobody who ate alone, hiding behind the rim of his glasses, spending hours with his nose deep into old court cases and biomedical imaging. He witnessed many more instances of tasteless killings, and everytime he morphed his mind to whatever deranged person killed another human he felt the same thing; Disappointed. It did keep him up at night, he'd stare at his ceiling trying not to dwell on the cut throats, corpses mutilated by gunshots, or mugshots of weirdos who get off to abominable stuff. The worst of it was what people did BEFORE becoming a serial killer; Mauling cats, burning puppies, hurting anything that couldn't fight back. Vulgar. Tasteless.

His roommate was often never in the room, instead partying over on the southside of the campus. His collections of Funko Pops occupied half of the desk, but Will didn't have it in him to tell him to move them. In the dorm, when not trying to forget, he would stare at the single framed picture that hung in the room and every time it would transport him back to that very summer day. He would stare at the drawing for hours, each petal and ripple would make him smell Hannibal's cologne. Sometimes he traced his fingers over the man's signature. Hannibal L. He never did find out his last name. He definitely did not go to John Hopkins Medical School, though he thought about it, because what kind of a creep would that make him?

He spent the night dreaming of Lousianna. Of his dad, who he frequently called alongside Cleetus, of Lake Pontchartrain and the fish he would catch, of the lures he would make, of that man wearing a button up in ninety-degree weather with muddy dress shoes, a man who touched his back and whispers from somewhere in his mind "**Come find me**".

One night, when his roommate left for some late night snacks with this girl across the dorm, Will stared at the painting again. He laid flat on his bed dressed in only his boxers, head tilted so he could view the muddy waters. This time he focused on Hannibal's voice calling out to him, he let himself imagine him in that boat. How would he look even more casual? With nothing on? Will thought about the hand on his back pushing him down, the thick accent in

his ear calling him “darling”. He palmed the growing erection in his pants, tracing along the length before ultimately reaching in and giving himself a few strokes. Hannibal spoke though it all, until a small whimper escaped Will's mouth when he finished, spilling onto his hand and stomach. He stared at the sticky white mess before wiping it with his bed sheet, groaning, and rolling over ashamed.

In his third year he learns about a killer in Italy. A killer who created the most intricate scenes in a chapel. For once, he sees art in death. He gets absorbed. His final thesis is on ‘Il Mostro di Firenze’, gathering well perceived reviews. He almost worships him. False prophet to guide Will where his own morals are held together by a weak glue allied ‘justice’.

In his fourth year his dad calls him from the dorm's landline and tells him Cleetus has passed.

When Will graduates he goes back to New Orleans as a police officer, living with his dad once again. Sharleen doesn't make bananas foster anymore. His dad’s quieter. Sharleen passes. After Five years Will is offered the position as a homicide detective. Will learns he has exceptionally high levels of both emotional empathy, and cognitive empathy, which explains why he always felt like he was in other people's minds. Being able to envision the killer's mind makes Will highly sought out for.

The drawing still hangs in his office.

As years go by he forgets his voice.

His dad doesn't remember Will anymore. Will takes care of him.

The drawing still hangs on his wall.

Will flies to Quantico to try and be an FBI agent. Will does not pass the screening. He's not mentally sound, the shadow of his father bears too much on his soul. Jack Crawford suggests a teaching position until then.

His dad forgets how to feed himself. Will flies back.

Will rejects the offer. He takes care of his dad. The city repossessed the boatyard. It gets turned into a dump.

His dad passes away holding Will's hand. Will wishes he told him ‘I love you’ more than he did.

Will moves to Wolf Trap, Virginia, with his dad’s fishing box and becomes a Fish and Game warden for Shenandoah National Park.

The drawing still hangs on his wall, but Will doesn't remember why.

Wolf Trap Virginia, November 12th 2013.

Will grumbles as he tugs on Winston’s leash, the mixed lab slobbering all over his fitted army green work pants while muddy pawprints get pressed into his black work boots. He tries to ignore the throb in his skull as he settles his rowdy dog,

“Winston sit!” the mutt finally listens, sitting down obediently next to his master as Will unbuckles his leash, “I’ll be back tonight, go play with your… siblings,” with a final kiss to his snout Winston happily skips away to join the rest of the pack, seven rescues Will has brought home with him over the past six years he's been working as.. Park Ranger… in the park. He sighs, exhausted from yesterday's work clearing snow from the paths, and rubs the scruffiness of his beard. He watches Winston tug at another dog’s ears in front of the mantel, before sliding on his winter coat no doubt covered in dog fur. The dark brown leather engulfs his Park Ranger shirt, covering all the patches and his nametag and the same army green tie he's been wearing for the past six years. Throwing on his brown beanie he takes one final look at his house; Quaint, vintage floorboards, and a sweaty ruffle of blankets thrown haphazardly on the coach where he sleeps. He locks the door twice for good measures and trudges through the sludge of ice, dirt, and snow until he makes it to his good ol’ Chevrolet Truck. How she’s managed to survive all these years is a mystery not even God can answer. Hopping in he blows warm air in his hands, and lets the engine run for a bit so it can warm up. He reaches over to clip on his winter gloves to his side buckle, throwing old trash into the side compartments and finding some Advil in said compartment, He pops a few to hopefully alleviate the headache that's been growing behind his eyes the past few days. Looking at himself in the mirror, he drives off, the creme and red truck driving over snow Will was too lazy to plow onto the long stretch of road outside his house.

As he drives through pine and oak, he remembers the Wisterias outside his dads house and boatyard. Will laughs to himself, remembering those days and remembering his dad. He remembers in the foggy part of his brain, a warm summer day where he felt loved. It's been Nineteen years since Will's seen Hannibal, and he doesn't even know that. Will's lonely, the dogs merely comfort him, they don't replace. Will wonders how many more it's gonna take till he feels whole again. If Will drives fast enough the scenery blurs to the right amount that he can imagine the Spanish moss and bayou he used to drive by. If he looks straight ahead, he can still see his dad in his peripheral vision sitting in the passenger seat talking about the latest football game. Snow starts to fall so Will flips on his wipers, fixing his mirror and turning on that same old radio, the display reading 5:00 am. This time a talk show plays and Will pretends to not be interested in the drama playing through the speakers.

Right? So at the wedding his childhood sweetheart showed up…

No way, and what did he do?

Well he called off the wedding!

Oh my god… wait but didn't he say she was her cousin?

Yes! First cousins too-

"Oh my god," Will sings as he turns into the entrance of the park, with large Chestnut trees lining the entryway. His wheels roll over twigs and rocks, causing for a bumpy ride and he prays his shocks don't go out again, he doesnt have another three hundred to spend. He makes his way through the park, passing waterfalls and trials before entering the main office parking lot. White snow covers half the spots in the lot making the red of the office stick out like a sore thumb. He parks and gathers his utility belt, pausing as his hands touch the gun,

"Graham!" a booming voice calls out, Will spins around locating his colleague Barney Matthews stumbling down the ligneous steps leading to the main entrance of the office. Will smiles while he hooks on his belt, locking the car with a mechanical clank, and heads towards the other man noticing the man's eyebrows furrowed as he rubs his bald head,

"Barney, what's the matter?"

"I'll tell ya what," snow starts to fall silently between them, a crow caws, "Some idiot has been using salt licks near bearfence," Will rolls his eyes at the cheap trick, salt licks are like using corn for fishing, something Will has grown to resent. It baits the deer into staying right where you can shoot it, it isn't right, and it isn't fair,

"I don't get why they can't just play fair and square," Barney shakes his head and guides Will back to his truck,

"Me either Graham, cheater cheater pumpkin eaters,"

"You are literally the only person who says tha-"

“Shut the hell up and get in your damn truck. And dont come back till you find them fuckers,” Barney shakes his head before turning around and leaving Will to his own devices. Will laughs at him as he reenacts the same routine from this morning, this time heading out to bearfence. It takes only eight minutes of driving before he pulls into Bearfence trail's separate parking lot. The snow plowers have already driven through this area so the lots are cleaned as he drives in. One car sits parked in the furthest spot next to the dark pine fencing, but it's been there long enough that a sheet of white covers most of it. Will looks at the “NO OVERNIGHT PARKING” sign not even three feet away from the black sedan, and Will's stomach starts burning. He squints his blue eyes before turning onto the trail itself. He’ll keep that car in mind. Maybe look for any tents set up where they are not supposed to.

About five minutes in, passing frozen over mulberries and a few rabbit tracks his fingers start throbbing from the cold so he pulls on the gloves, reaching low into his belt. While looking down he sees something sticking out of a snowpile on the right of him. He snaps the gloves on, kneeling to the segway that's been covered in clouds of white, and reaches for the black corner that sits in the very bottom jutting out. He pulls it revealing a black leather wallet with a couple of dollars still in it. Will examines it wondering if it belongs to that car, he has a few coupons, an expired hunting pass, and the ID inside displays a ginger man with the name Ryker Smith. Forgoing his original mission of the salt licks, Will decides to venture off trail into a secluded meadow. It isn't unusual for hunters to veer off trails, but Will doesnt like it all that much. With a shallow sigh, he leaves a deep set of footsteps as the wind begins to whip his ears. His nose feels raw, and the snow dampens any sound so he can only hear his breathing or the whistling wind. The meadow he's reached is barren, the treelines a mix of deep blue and white. Far off in the distance he sees a stag in the middle of the field staring right at him. Will looks around more, searching for anyone in the treelines. The stag hasn't moved, a blue shadow in the midst of gray with his antlers branching out to the clouded sky. Will steps closer but the journey is hard as the snow is about a good two feet here in the untouched land. Everything has a blue cast, and Will can't help but feel unsettled,

“Hey!” Will cuffs his hands around his mouth, yelling at the stag, “Shoo! Get out of here,” but it doesn't move. That's odd. Deers are usually the most skittish animal there is, and Will bargains that maybe there's a salt lick nearby. Nearly falling in the snowdrift, Will heads in, but something pulls in his stomach to turn back. The windy snow makes visibility hard, so it isn't until Will is fifteen feet from the stag he sees the color is all off; It most likely has a bad case of mange, where there would be fur, a sickly red stretched across its body leaving it looking skinless. Will wipes his face where the snowflakes began to catch on his lashes, and when he opens his eyes a human face is staring right back at him. Oh.

Will doesn't breathe for a few heartbeats, he doesn't scream, he can’t scream, but his pulse throbs faster in his neck and nausea builds in his stomach. It's been six years since he's had to see death so up close, so he closes his eyes while a cold sweat pinches his skin. He walks around the... animal… small crunches where he steps as he circles. Someone replaced the Stags hide with that of a human, in fact, judging by the red fringe that covers the face stretched on the deer skull, the body is Ryker Smith. The skin is stretched so tenderly and

Will notices the antlers have some sort of ivy wrapped around them, frozen stiff from the night. On the ground is a single magnolia, white with a red center almost snowed in yet blood is still visible under the crystals. It seems almost elegant, the amount of care that goes into it, Will can feel longing radiating from the scene. Each tendon tenderly stretches across the limbs of the animal, bloody ligaments stretching like vines engulfing every bone. Will can see fur poking out in between the gaps in muscle. This wasn't tasteless., but he wouldn't call it beautiful. Will looks around some more, there's no footprints and this sculpture has gathered a small layer of snow, yet not as thick as the one on the car. The victim's wallet burns deep in Will's pocket. He lets out a pained shudder before turning around and beelining it for the office.

"Will! Did you find the-" Will shoved past Barney, shoving open the green door of the vermillion office, almost dropping the birch "we're open!" sign that hangs on the outside, "Graham!"

"Not now Barney, we need to call the cops a-and possibly the FBI- there's oh my god!" Will throws his hands around trying to get Barney to understand the situation, shaky and his pulse wont go down. Barney moves past Will pushing his chest to prevent him from entering his personal office,

"Now Graham, do you wanna tell me what the hell is going on?" They stared at each other in front of the large diagram of mountain lions, before Will slowed his breathing and finally spoke,

"There… is a… I found a body," Barney instantly goes rigid ready to grab the phone, " but wait, it's not a normal body… someone… h-he…"

Made art.

"….he skinned the guy and placed him on a mantle… like a trophy. I thought it was a deer on a salt lick-" Barney now pulls away, giving Will some breathing space while he contemplates what was said,

"You're not messing with me right Graham?" Will's labored breathing stops as he rips off his beanie, exposing a wild mess of curls,

"No Barney! Theres a fucking dead guy why would I make that up!" Will's shout bounces back against the wood panels, Barney pulls away, walking over to the phone silent as he strides over the rug.

"Alright Graham, you're too distraught-"

"I'm not distraught!" Barney shoots him a discerning look,

“As I was saying, go put out road blockers to Bearfence while I call the station, don't let anyone in or out of bearfence, understand?” Will scowls before shoving himself past Barney, throwing his beanie back on and marching out the door.

Luckily no one leaves Bearfence, but Will does have to turn away a few unhappy campers. A mom screams at him for ruining her child's winter vacation, Will wants to scream at her that some young guy's winter vacation is cut short as he sits there dead on some deer bones, but he chooses the silent option. Will shuts down the nearby trailheads just in case, trying not to slip on black ice as he drags the five feet ‘Closed’ warnings. His eyelashes are frozen over and Will can't tell if he's been crying. By the time he's finished barricading the main street, a wave of cop cars greet him at the entrance, and he walks over to the first one.

“Hey Ranger,” greets the officer, but it hardly sounds friendly, “Where did you say it's at?” Will produces a map from his inner coat pocket, handing it to the man,

“Just eight minutes down this road. I put up some red tape. Its-” Will opens the pamphlet and points to the exact area he ventured off trail, “Here's the meadow, the body- I found it there and-”

“Why don't you just get in and show us, if you don't mind.” Will watches his breath condensate like smoke, trailing him as he heads around to the passenger side. The cop reaches over to open the door for him, and Will sits down against the black leather seat, trying not to touch the equipment on the left of him.

“Been a long time since I’ve been in one of these,” Will admits as the cop begins to drive, parading a caravan of cop cars after him.

“Didn’t take you for a criminal,” Will snaps his head to look at the officer, “I’m just kidding,” and the man lets out a tight laugh.

“Yeah I served in the late nineties, early two-thousands,”

“Where at?” Will swallows dryly, looking down in his lap and feeling the seat below him turn into his dad’s handmade bench,

“New Orleans,” He still never pronounces it ‘or-leens’, keeping the familiar ‘ar-lins’, perhaps the only indication he was once from there,

“Cool, welcome back officer,” the cop reaches and sips at his coffee, reminding Will how desperately he needs one too.

By the time they arrive at the scene the clouds have parted and the snow has stopped, sky blue contrasted against the red of the Stag. Cops huddle fast around, marking any pathways with yellow tape as Will recounts to the officer- officer Rodriguez- his exact steps, handing him the wallet as he apologies for touching it; He didn't know it was gonna be a crime scene. Some cops head back to get some permits regarding the car after it's confirmed to be Ryker Smiths. The motion dies down and Will wonders what they’re waiting for, at least until a

strew of black, unmarked SUVs spill out into the parking lot. Like an army of ants, people scatter out of the cars strewn into the snow. FBI. Will bites his inner cheek.

Jack Crawford in a gray suit comes out of the first SUV, alongside a young asian woman in a maroon sweater. They start to march towards them while the cops grumble about it.

“Alright Graham give us the rundown,” Jack announces as the field agents swarm the scene, the lady in the maroon sweater headfirst into collecting samples.

“Jack.”

“Will. Still a one trick pony?” Will wishes he still had his glasses, opting out for contacts the past two years. They still sit next to his bed stand, untouched. He settles on staring at the treeline right besides Jack's head instead of the usual frames.

“Last time I recall you wanted me for that trick,” in the corner the lady shoots Jack a scolding look, Jack ignores her,

“And last time I checked you turned me down, how's dad?” Will decides the ground is far more interesting than that damn treeline.

“He passed,”

“I'm sorry to hear that, alright Beverly I’m not paying you to stand there and-” Jack walks off into the crowd of field agents, leaving Will standing with his mind in Louisiana.

Silence ensues for a while, at least it does to Will. Tuning out the commotion and examining his shoes.

“Probably just some sick fuck who got off to this shit, huh” Officer Rodrigueze lightly nudges Will with his elbow, the dark navy parka he wears compliments the brown leather coat Will wears. Will thinks about how he felt looking at the magnolia, how he felt staring into the eyes of the man. Someone from his childhood sits behind his eyes, someone who smells like a good dream.

“No, no... he misses someone” Will states.

“I’m sorry?” the lady in maroon whom he presumes is Beverly, asks as she strolls back from the stag. He notices Jack staring him down, and his stomach unsettles, sweat beading at his forehead despite the cold.

His vision turns dark and he can feel his eyelashes flutter from where they closed, but now he doesn't feel the twelve something agents, and the snow he stands on isn't as deep as it was. He's tired from a chase as he grabs the pliable skin and stretches it over the fur of a deer. The hunter becomes the hunted.

I drop the magnolia, it's a small clue as to who I am. An even bigger clue as to who I seek. I've been waiting for you and you're here. In these woods, breathing with me. I take this cheater and rebirth him into something beautiful, make him valuable. Rid him of his crimes. Take this monument of your innocence, of my sin, of our love. You know you would do it too, This is my design.

‘**Come find me**’

“The deer… the killer didn't harm it, he only used its remains to mock this guy, the guy did something wrong. Something punishable by god…”

“So he thinks he’s god?” Jack asks,

“Not quite, it's more like…he harmed the innocent… animals,” he thinks about the salt licks, “...maybe check around for salt licks or something I’m not sure, he had an expired hunting pass but-”

“I’m sorry Will we don’t take orders from you,” Jack begins,

“Listen it’s,” he feels the killer in his mind, “the magnolia,” everyone looks at where the white petals lay in a frozen puddle of blood, “it means he misses someone. And its a clue as to who exactly that someone is. He's reaching out with this. M-maybe he's making a name for him but he most definitely misses someone”

Beverly shouts “He’s right about the guy being a cheater, there's salt all over this deer’s mouth!”

“How do we even know that was him? What if some other lazy hunter did it?” Jack counters, Will hears it again, ‘ *I take this cheater and rebirth him into something beautiful’.*

“We can check his car, I'm guessing it was the one in the lot.” says a random agent at Beverly’s side.

“It is,” confirms Rodriguez, “The permit’s going through as we speak,”

“Will, come here” Jack pulls on Wills shoulder, making him take a staggering step back, Jack and him walk off towards the trees, “Do you think you can stick around for this,”

“I don't know Jack,” Will starts, “I wasn't cleared- and it's been so long I'm sure, and im only helpful if the killer stays in the park which we don't even know if he-”

“Do you think he will?” Will rubs his neck, eyebrows scrunched, ‘ *You know you would do it too.’*

“yes,”

“Then it's settled, we can get you cleared, that's not an issue.” he shouted for Beverly, “Give Dr. Bloom a call so we can get him cleared,” Beverly starts making her way over, “And Will, I’ll assign you as special investigator so you can have access to the crime scene,”

“I don't think she'll do it, sir,” Beverly interrupts,

“And why the hell not?” Jack snaps as she looks around nervously,

“He's a random civilian, she'll see it as wrong to involve him in something this… morbid,”

“Random civilian? This is Will Graham the best damn homicide-” he sighs, ” you’re right, then give Lecter a call. He'll be more ‘considerate’” Considerate is said with a sarcastic spat, Jack starts to walk off but turns his head to Will, “It's just temporary Will, besides, I know how bad you've wanted this, this can be your chance. You can say no whenever,”

“Wait! I’ll still be able to do my Park duties… right?”

“Yeah yeah you can clean as many septic tanks as you want as long as I don't call you in, and I doubt anyones gonna come here when they find out there's a killer in the woods,” He stops for a second, “And Graham? Don't disappoint me. This is a very special offer,”

Will doesn't want to say no to this offer, so as Bevcerly writes out Lecter’s address, he accepts it.

“Don't worry about barging in, we’ll call Dr. Lecter tonight so he knows you're coming. He also will ask if you would like weekly appointments with him while dealing with all this death; You can decline,” Will looks at the address, Baltimore, “Also, don't try and kiss him okay?” Will looks up slowly from the paper,

“I'm sorry?”

“Every newbie we send over comes back with hearts eyes for the man, don't be like them” Beverly is smiling so he knows it’s a joke,

“I dont think thats going to be a problem,”

“You haven't seen him yet,” Beverly whistles and Will laughs, “I’m Beverly by the way. Beverly Katz,” she holds out her hand and they commence in a firm shake,

“Will… Graham… but I’m sure you know that”

“Ah…Jack's failed protege…hey… heart to heart, if you don't wanna do this, let us know,” she rests her hand on his back giving him a comforting smile. He wants to go back to

pretending he's normal, but his dream, the art, the delicacy, he needs to know who did it. Because deep down, he knows. He just doesn't remember,

“I do.”

Later on that evening Will and Barney are seated at a little red window booth at a local diner just outside the park. It's designed to look like an old Cabin, it always smells like home fries, and has a big aluminum sign out front that says ‘BREAKFAST ALL DAY’. Neither of the men have touched their respective dinners; Barney ordered blueberry waffles and Will ordered chicken fried steak.

“Pancakes is crazy, man” Will mutters in between sips of his coffee.

“You always start this shit man, everytime we fuckin’ come here. Why don't you live a little Graham,”

“If living is eating like an eight year old, maybe I'll pass,” Barney shakes his head in what might be real anger,

“It's called fun, Graham-cracker. F. U. N. Fun! My wife says women love a guy with a silly side. Maybe that's why you don't have one,” Will looks outside the window, the street leading into the park empty,

“Nah, I just don't have…” The stag is outside. It's in the street, staring at him with its blackened figure.

Come.

Come find me…

Will’s blood runs cold, and as the first car in the hour they've been there drives by, it's gone. Will looks back at his plate sweaty and his head begins to throb again.

“Will? You okay man?” Will shakes his head, hair scratching at his forehead,

“Yeah just… long day…” Barney slumps back into the booth,

“Go home Graham, go rest. I'll take care of the bill,” Will gets up, gathering his jacket and beanie,

“I owe you Barney,”

At home after showering, popping more Advils and feeding the dogs, Will snuggles into the couch next to his pack of seven and tries to get some sleep. Tomorrow he has to talk to Dr. Lecter, apparently some dreamboat to new recruits. Will snorts and turns over, Winston lays on his leg.

He dreams of the stag. He sits. And waits.

Baltimore, Maryland, November 13th, 2013 9:56am

Will walks into a very posh waiting room with jellied legs after an hour or so of driving. He finds his place on a small gray sitting chair that is neither comfy or hard. After two minutes he decides he hates sitting and walks around the room observing all the paintings on the wall. Some drawings look familiar, but he can't place a finger as to why. Will looks at his phone. Two more minutes until Dr. Lecter greets him. He stares at the dark wooden door while tightening up his flannel. Today he wore his dark gray flannel with some lighter cargo pants, and attempted to comb back his hair to no avail. He even trimmed his beard he thinks as he scratches it slightly, much more uniform and presentable. He even put on the aftershave he keeps getting on Christmas, alongside his glasses for the first time in years, yesterday spooking him out of eye contact again. His uniform is in the car but he didnt wanna show up to a... doctor… appointment in his work clothes, especially since he hasn't washed them in two days, even more so yesterday he was at an active crime scene whe-

The door creaks open, and an older man with dark blonde hair now grayed opens it. He’s wearing a red dress shirt, a black vest, and a patterned necktie. Their eyes meet. It takes Will one look before all of a sudden he’s eighteen, sitting on a motorboat after a whole afternoon fixing boat motors while the sun sings and the moon cries. He feels the kisses of a thousand lightning bugs. He smells the Wisteria and his dads cooking. He's young and doesn't know what's going to happen yet. He just spent all day with a European man who kissed his mind and left a scar so deep that Will can still feel the sting after nineteen years.

“Hello, Will.”

“Hello, Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

cliff hanger ik...

I Wait For You

Chapter Notes

Betaed by Dysphoria (Starr_Dustt_Dysphoria)

Thank you so so much!!!!!!!

Enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“and now he's howling like a beagle – yips, brays,

gagging growls – and scratching the sill paintless,

that's how much he's missed you, the two of you,”

David Baker, “Mongrel Heart”

“Please, come in.” Hannibal closes his eyes and tilts his chin up as he pushes in the door with his back, exposing the interior of his office; Books line the walls and Will can sense that accepting therapy from Hannibal would cost him his life savings. Will’s feet stay grounded for it feels as though he's forgotten how to walk. In fact, his legs don't even feel like his anymore, rather some foreign extension of what he believes to be himself, a different being all together. His legs belong to a young man who eats cornbread and catfish every Sunday, and spends all night fixing boat motors. They won't move unless he does.

All of a sudden the faceless man from his dreams has a voice, a smell, a life, and it’s visualizing right in front of him. It's too much for him. Awestruck, the two men study each other, breathing the other in, one pained and one in a loving matter. A clock somewhere ticked forward, announcing how many seconds the men wasted lost in the other. A light curl to Hannibal’s lip appears as Will remembers where he is and pushes himself into his office.

The office was surely a reflection of Hannibal himself, Will sensing he was entering a that of a predator's den. Dark wood floors, two story book cases, paintings lining the walls and some what could be danish furniture filling the atmosphere. Certainly sophisticated, Will prays he won't bring in dog hair, bring something so foreign into a place that most likely has never had a furry companion present. Will is out of place, at least he thinks that as he studies the white and red striped curtains that drape the windows. A poor peasant visiting the library of alexandria. Will stands as an interloper.

Will most definitely cannot afford this, even more so because he took the morning off just to be here. Barney was no doubt mad, left to calm a sea of angry park goers. His mind begins to wander about in the Trees of Shenandoah National Park, almost losing himself in the snowy branches before Will can sense Hannibal's eyes tracking him. Will walks towards a set of matching leather chairs, both high in quality, so much so they might even be handmade. Jesus Christ, thinks Will, even the chairs scream money.

“You may sit,” Hannibal's accent has dulled down the past nineteen years, but Will can't tell, given he's forgotten his voice long before that. Hannibal gestures to one of said chairs, before each of the men take their respective position, “Hopefully the drive wasn't too strenuous,” there's a friendly tone, but nothing more.

If Hannibal did feel any sort of excitement or shock from seeing Will, he gave no indication of it . His voice stood smooth and he kept the same pleasant smile one would give the postman. A doctor-to-patient smile that made the pit in Will's stomach grow heavier, making each passing breath harder than the previous. He can't stand to look into his eyes, so his eyes follow his familiar glasses frames. It’s protection, one he hasn't needed since god knows when.

“I drive the same amount to work everyday, so it's nothing unusual,” Will assured, Hannibal's eyes won't leave Will, burning his skin, like he's mapping every vein and line Will’s body has to offer. Will knows he can counter the stare, for if he looks at Hannibal’s face he would feel the old familiar pain he used to cry to in college. That old familiar pain his own father cried to the day Will's mother left; The sickly dull ache of abandonment. Of longing. It's funny how every person who knew Will before Wolf Trap has left, a young Louisiana man long forgotten in the wrinkles of time.

Until now.

Hannibal reaches for a few files hanging on the small glass table next to him, riffling through printed pages with a disinterested pattern, “Ah yes, a Park Ranger of Shenandoah National Park, how's that going for you?” Will swallows, noting how beautiful the sun is where it peeks through the window, “Is it fulfilling?” Will wonders if what he does actually fulfills him, or if it soothes the pain that never seems to leave. He thinks about the wolves, the fish, the birds, the sun and the moon.

“Yes I… I do what I love all day, surrounded by what I like…” Hannibal doesn't say anything, instead crossing his legs waiting for Will to continue, “Nature… it’s fulfilling work to me,"Hannibal hums, writing something down on the files. Will wonders if the older man also smells the marsh.

Will hears Hannibal ruffling the papers more and Will clenches his jaw, “In that case, what brings you back to the field? Mr. Graham” the formality makes Will’s heart ache, and he hopes Hannibal doesn't see the twitch in his eyelid,

“I think we both know why, assuming you've read my file, I have a gift and Jack needs me, the Park needs me.” Hannibal scans the papers as if he didnt reread them already once they were sent,

“An empath,” there's a slight pause as Hannibal waits for Will to confirm. He never does. “Useful when you were a homicide detective, yes? So now Jack wants to use it,”

“Yeah, I'm his ‘one trick pony’,” Will doesn't see Hannibal's frown, “I guess he's not wrong, I think it's better for me to use it for good rather than useless shit, be a good pony, you know?”

“Does that bother you? Having that rather demeaning imagery assigned to your name?”

Will plays with the frayed threads at his flannel’s cuffs, “A little insulting, but at least it's a useful trick,”

“Perhaps a dog is a better fit?” Will finally looks at Hannibal’s face, ignoring the tug on his guts so he can give him a perplexed look, he has new wrinkles in the creases of his eyes, “If you don't like to think of yourself as Jack’s ‘pony’.”

Will scoffs. Then downright laughs in Hannibal’s face. Rolling his eyes and leaning back, “Yeah that's way better, Jack's own trained doggy made to sniff out killers, way less dehumanizing Ha-…Dr. Lecter,”

Hannibal grins, “Yes, but a dog can still bare its teeth, have motive, be free.” Will stiffens, “ How do you feel about that, Will?” Hannibal finally dropped the formality act, allowing Will the happiness of hearing his own name in that addicting voice. Will huffs, calmer than before. He's not quite sure how he feels, it feels good to be wanted and needed, and to do something actually useful is also a bonus. To have it be the one to use him, Will could respond anyway really.

“I suppose it’s not the worst, Jack wanted me before but I turned him down, I guess I owe the man something, I can be a good dog…” The last part is said in an unsure manner. Red eyes meet blue, there's an odd hunger in both, but it's left unaddressed.

“Why did you turn it down?”

An uncomfortable silence ensues, at least at Will's end because Hannibal keeps the same straight face, “My father got Alzheimers, I wanted to take care of him, then field work just seemed like too much after he passed.”

“I’m sorry for your loss, Will.” Will can feel his dads hand on his back, quaint and delicate, In between the ticking of the clock on Hannibal’s wall is the slight whisper of an ‘I love you’, “I know the passing of a relative can be hard,”

“I thought you didn't care for your parents,” Will doesn't know how he knows that, but the wisterias in the back of his mind is a good sign as to why.

Hannibal blinks, a small fracture in the mask he wears reveals shock from Will's remark, “Yes, but my sister's passing affected me,” Hannibal says, regaining his cool composure in the split of a second.

“You had a sister?” Hannibal curtly nods,

“Are you lonely, Will?” The mood sours further, Will reflects on his pack of dogs, of Barney, and the maple trees that stand in for his marshes,

“No, I have seven dogs back home, and my colleagues, so no I'm not alone,” eyebrows raise at the quantity of the dogs, but no other emotions show past that,

“Perhaps the dogs aid in comfort, but do these people see you for who you are? Or do you feel like a wallflower in your own skin? Alone isn't the same thing as lonely Will,” the line cuts deep into Will's heart, aching and stinging in all the worst ways. He's always been a wallflower… and lonely. Even his own mind betrays him, his true self sitting along the wall waiting, anticipating, for the right moment. He thinks about his mom, he thinks about that tall European man who brought out the Will that lurks in his mind, then left him in shambles;

He abandoned you Will…

He left you and never turned back…

Hunt him, consume him, eat him so he never gets a chance to leave again,

Take this monument of your innocence, of my sin, of our love,

Become whole.

Will's forehead breaks out in a light sweat, Hannibal picking up on the feverish sweat scent, “I dont get how this aids in my clearance,” Will glares at the small statue behind Hannibal; A black stag made of metal Will cannot name.

The thick Lithuanian accent fills the room once more, acoustics sticking in Will’s mind like a sweet honey, “Very well,” more ruffling, “perhaps I can ask more intimate questions later. It is my duty to extend the offer of a weekly therapy session given how close you work with death; You may decline,”

Will wipes his glasses, “I don’t know how I'll feel about therapy, I don't like people probing around my mind too much, and I don't think I can afford you,”

“And yet you become Jack’s dog,” Will seethes, but simply leans further back into the chair, “As for the price, the FBI will cover the expenses, and as for the probing; It could be more casual, we don't have to establish a Doctor-Patient relationship, perhaps it could be thought of as a weekly mingle,”

Will wants to say no, he wants to go home to his pack and resow every stitch in his heart that the sight of Hannibal has reopened; From behind Hannibal, the stag whispers to him:

“Come find me,”

“Very well, we can do that..” Hannibal hums to himself pleased,

“Wednesdays at 6:00 work?” Will thinks about the drive,

“No it'll take me two hours to get here from work, can we do 7:00?”

“How about 7:30?”

Will smiles, “That would be perfect,” They stare at each other again, any anger Will felt slowly dissolving into a warm muddy mess, Hannibal leans back observing,

“Whatever happened to your accent? I always did find it so charming,” A breath hitches as Will gets a deep punch in the gut at the first sign of Hannibal’s remembrance of Will. No doubt they recognized each other, but to hear Hannibal address it made Will’s cheeks glow a soft pink, as if he's spent three hours plowing snow.

“Well unlike your ‘attractive’ accent that makes you sound sophisticated, mine just got me called white trash… and ignored of course, I'm sure you can understand, Doctor.”

“I'm not sure I do,” Hannibal leans forward, keeping a calm façade as Will grips his own thighs, “I recall finding it rather exhilarating and very… pleasant.”

Now that elicits a much different reaction in Will, one that burns low and aches in his thighs. He’s not certain but Hannibal might’ve just said that in an ever heavier accent. Hannibal can smell that same honey he remembers so clearly from an old summer day, he doesn't know what it is but the scent thrills him.

“Well doctor, maybe you do but many don't,” Will argues, trying to bluff his way out, “but… I’ll keep it in mind,”

“Preferably,” Hannibal goes back to the stoic nature leaving Will feeling gutted, “I didn't know your full name was William,” the brunette blinks a few times at his full legal name,

“I don't prefer it, so please don't call me that,” Hannibal falls silent,

“Very well.”

There's an awkward drag in the room and Will runs a hand through his curls, he's unsure if he should bring up their past, “Am I cleared then?”

“Yes,” Hannibal's face almost reads as disappointed, but it’d gone in a second so Will isn't sure it was really even there. Will’s phone starts to buzz frantically in his pants pocket and he audibly lets out a sigh of relief. Hannibal sits still as Will answers.

“Jack just called me in, he wants to go over the forensic reports,” Hannibal nods, getting up and handing Will a small paper. Their fingers brush and Will pretends to not notice the tingle it leaves, “What's this?”

“My phone number, work phone number,” Hannibal sits up, moving forward as he delicately guides Will to the office door by the small of his back. Will bites his tongue so hard it might be bleeding. In fact he thinks it is, “I’ll see you at 7:30 Wednesday night, if you must reach me before then, please refer to that number.” The younger man looks at the reflective card. Fancy.

Will awkwardly turns around to face him one last time, “Um... Yeah thanks,” Hannibal tightly press his lips together,

“Goodbye, Mr. graham,”

“Goodbye, Doctor Lecter,”

“Oh, and Graham,” Will looks back, “be a good dog for Jack,” Hannibal gives Will a wolf-like smile, sharp teeth barred to the world.

Loyal as a dog. I wait for you.

The door closes and just like that, Will is left alone, insulted, and disappointed. As he walks back to his car he thinks it over.

He didn't really know what to expect, hell he didn't even know he was ever gonna see that man again. Should he even feel like a kicked puppy right now? And besides, it wasn't like they had confessed their love for one another and promised to return; They merely spent a day and a half screwing around the marsh in their early years. Insignificant. Will tries to convince himself to not be hurt by it, but the sting is so fresh and he just grumbles. There's something he can't quite place on the doctor though, something a little more sinister. To get into the mind of Hannibal was tricky and Will didn't know why. Every time he attempted to while on the way to Quantico kept putting him in the same spot; A large stag calling out to him.

Come find me…

Hunt me.

Hannibal closed his office door with a quiet thud. He stood for a second holding his palm against the wood, inhaling the scent of Will's ridiculous aftershave. Hannibal notes to destroy that wretched thing the first chance he gets. Will does smell different though, but perhaps that's Hannibal's memory playing tricks on his mind. Hannibal’s sure deep beneath the aftershave, the dark pine, the sugar maple, the dog dander, and the sweet sickly fever lays the fresh, earthy scent he remembers so fondly. A boy raised by nature. With eerie silence he

made his way to his desk, the dark wood contrasting against the series of drawings splayed, each depicting the same blue eyes staring directly at the viewer. Hannibal looks over to the files displaying ‘William Graham’. He’ll find me, Hannibal thought, with time.

Quantico, Virginia November 13th, 2013 1:00pm

Beverly Katz is the first person to greet Will as he enters the forensics lab, Price and Zeller follow. Their greetings were short but kind as Will situated himself in the room. The stag was currently covered by a thin white cloth while they waited for Jack.

“So… did you kiss him?” Beverly teases, Will snorts as he remembers their first encounter on that snowdrift,

“No, but you're not gonna believe this… I've already met him,” All three of them whip their heads to stare down Will.

“Actually? From where?” Beverly asks, crossing her arms while the two other men nod in curiosity.

Will ignores his stomach flipping when he remembers Louisiana, “When I was young, he came by and um…” Will thinks hard, “I think he bought a fish from me?”

“A fish? You fish?” Zeller interjects while he peers under the cloth.

“Yeah,” Will continues, “yeah and then I took him fishing,” Will tenses as he remembers:

“I too hear the sun sing. And the moon. The birds sing me their songs.”

“Where was this?” Beverly pushes,

Will scratches at his beard, “Um Louisiana… shit 1994 or five...?” The group all look at one another, baffled, “What?”

“I didn't know you were highschool sweethearts,” laughs Price,

“Yeah Will, maybe the threat of you kissing was real,” Beverly adds, the group all laugh while Will rubs his face. His cheeks hurt.

“Was he young? Or did he look the same… Zeller and I have a bet he's a vampire so-”

“Alright ladies enough yapping, give Will the rundown,” Jack made his entrance, loud as ever. The group fully uncovers the stag and Will gets to gaze in its eyes again. Deep down he knows who did it, so why can't he remember?

The explanation is as follows:

The Killer did indeed NOT kill the stag. Two salt licks were found in the back of his trunk confirming the suspicions of foul play. The killer, however, did in fact steal Rykers heart, surgically replacing it with the stags. Every other organ was smashed together into the cavity of the deer so they could be morphed into “one” entity. Rykers clothes were found stitched into the stag's fur. As for the Magnolia and Ivy, a few guesses could be made; Ivy represents loyalty, loyalty as to what is unknown. Magnolia means luck.

“Maybe the killer needed a little faith,” Price jokes.

As for any fingerprints, nothing could be found. The sutures were all done by someone with either a surgical background or just really did his research. Will can't help but admire the precision and care that went into it.

“Our man Ryker here was from Chesapeake, so the news started to call him the “Chesapeake Ripper, "

Beverly informs Will. Will hadn't even thought about the news. Shit. Poor Barney is probably being swarmed with reporters right now begging for any input.

“Anything you can gather from this Graham,” Will thinks for a while but nothing makes sense. It’s been so long, his head is beginning to throb, and the only thing he can think about is his fucking psychiatrist.

“Not at the moment,” Will starts to pick at his cuticles, a nervous sweat breaking out. Pain starts to bloom behind his eyes.

“Then what the hell are you here for?” Jack curses, Will puts his hand on his hip and gestures to the Stag,

“What more do you want Jack? I told you, he’s looking for someone and we don’t know who that someone is.”

“Then find who it is!”

“I don’t know how!”

Beverly and the other two quietly make the exit, “Then get the hell out of here Graham. And don’t come back until you can be useful,”

Will storms out, defeated. One trick pony. He passes Beverly on his way out but doesn’t bother to say bye. He’ll probably regret that later. In the meantime he’s trying to get to his truck where it sits sandwiched between two black SUV’s, but some red headed chick in a tight brown jacket is standing in the way. Will rolls his eyes as he crunches on the black ice, he really doesn't have the time for this’ He needs to get out of here before he starts to go even more insane than he already feels. Her curls block almost all his vision and he tries to avoid looking at her matching blue eyes.

“Mr. Graham! I’m Freddie Lounds of the TattleTale crime, I was wondering if you-“ she starts to pull out something from her purse that rests on her right arm but Will tries to make it past her to his car door,

“No no I don’t have time for this-" Freddie pushes her way closer to Will and he takes a step back into the car.

“Do you not care about the park goers?” Freddie accuses and Wills head throbs harder in pain,

“Listen Ma’am, Lounds was it? I have so many other things to do right now so could you please get out of the way,” Freddie stares at him for a moment, before giving a small smirk and finally walking off.

Will rubs his temple then gets in his car, “God poor Barney,” Will mutters to himself.

Driving is rough as snow starts to fall again and Will's headache is even more relentless than before. The gray and cold muddle his mind till each street sign is blurry and Will is seriously debating going home, but he decides he needs to give his mind something to do.

An hour and a half later, Will walks up the steps to the Park office with his uniform draped over his right arm. He’s planning on changing in his own office room so as he walks past the green kiosk he peers over for Barney. Not here. Will enters his personal office and is greeted by a stale room with a warm light. He has a few paintings of fish hanging and a wolf plushie Barney got him for his 35th birthday sits on the corner of his desk. The desk is birch and the carpet is an ugly green that has a possible coffee stain in the corner. With a sigh Will closed the door and struggled into his uniform. He uses his phone camera to finger-comb his brown curls, resigning as they flop into his face. He's due for a cut, for his hair has begun curling around his neck giving him an even more shaggy appearance. He finds his Advils on his desk and pops some in his mouth, swallowing with a week old water bottle that was abandoned on top of his file cabinets.

Barney appears as Will steps out of the room, and saying he looked tired would be an understatement, Will walks up to him and gives him a once over. Even his uniform is

wrinkly,

“You look like hell Barnes, even your baldness has lost its shine-”

Barney gives Will a humorous punch to his arm while Will barks in laughter, “very funny Graham, given I just spent the past few hours deterring reporters,” Guilt settles low in Will’s guts,

“I'm sorry Barney,” Will shuffles his feet and looks up while he thinks, “They're all outside Bearfence then?”

“Yeah so I suggest you go manage Hawk’s Bill. If they see a new face out there they'll go rabid,” Will nods in agreement as he ruffles his hair. He forgot his beanie. “I'll manage this side since they're kinda violating the signs… Oh how was therapy?”

With a groan, ‘It wasn't therapy, just clearance. It was… fine.” His chest aches when he thinks about Hannibal's face, his stupid throw rug, and the softness of his voice.

“You dont look like it was fine,”

“I guess we both need a break huh,” Barney agrees and lets Will leave to Hawk’s Bill. On the drive there Will tries not to think about his psychiatrist. He fails.

The mountain is usually swarming with hikers in the summer, but here in the snowfall its a vacant mass of rocks and trees. Will stops in between campground checks to watch a few crows pick at some nuts on the ground, their black blending them into the branches and trunks of shedded trees. Will smiles to himself, mumbling about the ice fishing potential while he clears some snow from minor paths. Will finds the silence comforting, allowing escape from the past few days. Pain begins to pick up and the man takes a minute to sit. Something cracks from the trail leading up the mountain and when he looks up he's met with large glossy eyes.

The stag is here.

The stag is here and Will needs him. He doesn't know why, but an ache fills his chest and Will needs it.

Will needs it like he needs his dad back, like he needs to feel the sun again, like he needs hannibal. There in his arms once again.

Will begins to walk to it slowly, each crunch quieter than the last, and the stag doesn't move. It lets Will come to it. It stands and waits, waits for him, calling to him, and obeys. Like a good dog does.

It’s five and the daylight is running low. Will has been walking but the stag stays the same size, never coming closer no matter how many steps he takes. He passes black gum, Scarlet oak, Maple and birch but it doesn't come closer. Will feels a tear sting in his eyes as he cries out. The stag listens, and it waits. Its breath fogs in the air and the brunette can hear a faint whisper come from it, its fur ruffles in the wind. Will picks up his pace, running for it but it won’t give up.

Will shudders and marches on, “Why won't you respond?” he cries. The stag stays still. Everything is too much for him, Hannibal, the stag, the reporters. It's all too loud. He’s losing his mind. Why won’t he respond? Why did he kiss his mind and leave him to rot? Why did he fill his mind up with poison and leave him chasing the scent of foreign cologne?

He didn't fill you with poison, it's always seeped from your mind, a slow trickle that bloomed the day your mother left, you just figured out he feeds from it. Like feral animals you run together, forever alone, hunting.

“I needed you and you left me.” Will sobs while collapsing into the snow. He doesn't know where he is, all he knows is if he looks up it will disappear into the clouds, so Will shut his eyes and burrow his face in the snow. He sobs and sobs until his voice cracks and his nose hurts from here the ice touches it.

After what seems like an eternity hunched over something warm, wet, and soft presses against Will's curls.

The stag kissed him.

And just like that he's gone, leaving Will confused if he even exists anymore. He stays laying on his back in the snow for what feels like hours, until the moon comes out and Will remembers he has a pack to feed.

On the drive home the Moon soothes him.

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 14th, 2013

Will takes his dogs on a walk, following a night of no sleep and two cups of coffee. His shoulders are tight and his back aches but Winston presses on regardless, trudging the group onward against the snow. He knows the Stag is following him through the nearby woods, but he ignores it.

Ignoring is not the best option for the mess he walks into at the Park office. Blasting on the small TV Barney set up on the front kiosk is a young reporter talking over a photo of Will Graham most likely pulled off the “Meet our Staff!” page on the Parks site. The bright red letters at the bottom scream out in bold “I have other things to do right now!”.

“Holy fucking shit. That bitch,” Will curses s Barney shakes his head,

The hell did you tell her Graham,”

Will scratches his beard, “She.. Twisted my words she- well no she took it out of context,” Barney angrily throws away some trash he's left out,

“Yeah Graham? Is that what you want me to tell our park goers?”

“Um? Yes? If you don't believe that then you're a bigger idiot than I thought,” Will sighs and walks to the back and into his personal office, ignoring Barney’s heavy groans of frustration. Will is fucking starving and the last thing he needs is some angry hippies telling him that he doesnt care about their safety.

That does periodically happen throughout the day, Will merely hushes them out and goes back to gnawing his pencil to shreds. In between mundane tasks Barney and him reconcile against the water cooler, proceeding to waste time talking about fishing tips and avoiding the elephant in the room. Nearing evening Will gets a text from a random number:

Hey! Its Beverley I was wondering if you wanted to meet at Ganna’s tonight at 7 i have questions to ask lolll

This is true right?

**Will LOLLLLLLL*

Ganna's is an old Italian place just outside Wolf Trap, this he knows. Will is certain it's about the case, but the idea of making a new friend makes Will smile fondly at his phone screen before texting back,

Will: *Yes. How did you get my number? And also sure.*

Bev: *I have my ways (ur files lolll)*

Will: *Alright see you then.*

Great to know anyone can access his number, begs to question why Hannibal didn't text first, but the answer to that is some ethical doctor protocol. To believe that their relationship got dwindled down to some botched form of therapy makes Will's heart ache. The once spectacle of his life turned to stranger, even if he's kinda always been one. Reminds him of Il Monstro, the serial killer that shone light to Will that there are people out there like him who can make death beautiful. But Hannibal isn't some stone cold murderer that Will could get into the mind of, he isn't. Or is he? Maybe not a serial killer, but Will definitely sensed some danger both the first time and the last time he saw the older man; Maybe that is what excited Will, maybe he liked to dance with death. On the ride to Gannas, Will decides to not turn on the radio, and instead focuses on the sound of the wind whipping around him. The whistle is all so familiar to the day he found the stag, watching him with his magnolia. Will remembers his last encounter, where the beast kissed his mind right over the scar Hannibal left.

Will doesn't know how he made it to Gannas and seems to have little relocation of the drive there. A bit rattled but given his tango with the stag, Will is not surprised. His head aches even more and he considers going to the clinic soon, but that costs money and Will doesn't really have much at the moment.

The restaurant itself is a cozy little thing with red rooms and that stereotypical yellow lighting. Inside they have faux grapes that shine above like thousands of little lightning bugs. Warmth fills Will's cheeks and he tries to savor the nostalgia. The room is much warmer than outside so he takes off his coat to reveal his standard uniform. He asks the host who stands at a little wooden kiosk that he's waiting for Beverly Katz. She tells him she's already here and guides him back through different faces, random jars filled with random veggies, and old art that seems to have yellowed with age. One is familiar, and the blonde waitress notices him starring.

"Primavera, it's an old replica the Wonders bought," She says, giving Will a flirtatious smile. She's cute, but he simply just doesn't have the time. And what would he think? "What will *who* think?" Will asks himself mentally. Deep down he knows, he always did.

The scent of the place is wine and bread, which causes Will's stomach to rumble low in his shirt. Realizing they've made it to their table, he awkwardly shuffles into the booth in front of Beverly. She grinned at him, her black hair pulled back into a lazy bun that framed her face. She looked nice, Will would admit, but her energy is what was most compelling about her. She had a way of making you feel like she's been your best friend since grade school, very intelligent as well.

“Well howdy, partner,” Beverly greets and Will laughs and looks over the menu. Beef bolognese is what he settles on,

“Hey… so how’s it been?” Will asks as he pretends to look at the menu longer, Beverly sips at her iced tea,

“Ah, after you ruffled Jack's panties the rest of the lab was quiet… however I did have a question…” Will dreads as she pulls out her phone, flipping it around to show Will a body picture of a small knot, a fisherman's knot. Will remembers his dad teaching him those, and he loses his eyes to inhale the wisterias.

“A fisherman's knot?” Beverly nods, “Did… the killer… use this?”

“Used it to suture the heart instead of a regular surgeon's knot, do you know why? I’m just lost at this, every other sign leads to him being a surgeon so why would he use an ineffective knot to do something so.. grand?” The waiter comes back and they take a small break to order their respective dishes,

“Everything he does is meticulous,” Will begins, he feels his mind warping, “Maybe he's not a fisherman… Maybe he’s looking for one? A message to him,” Beverly gives him a vacant look as she finishes up the rest of her ice tea. The ice rattles in her cup,

“You're a fisherman, Will,” Will feels a chill run through his spine, he knows deep down the answer is yes, it's him,

“Almost every ranger, worker, and guest is a fisherman, Beverly. Besides, it.. He very well could be a fisherman this is all just speculation,”

“Speculation or correlation? You said he's seeking someone, and he sewed the heart? Maybe he loves this person?” Arousal settles slow in Will’s gut, he tries to ignore it, convince himself it's not for him,

“Regardless, it would lead us nowhere…”

“Well thank you anyways… we can talk about non-work things?” Will perks at this,

“Like what?”

The waiter comes back to drop off their meals, giving Will a wink that Beverly misses. Will does not return it, “Well…How exactly did you meet Hannibal? You said fish market but…” Will internally purrs at the use of the man's name, and he honestly doesn't know why. Maybe

it has to do with his sudden loss of time and sanity, or maybe it has to do with that one summer day. He looks at Beverly and contemplates opening up that day again for her.

And so he does. Will talks. Reveals how he saw the man, how he drove him around, how he took him to the place with a thousand suns, how he can hear the moon sing. He reveals more, how his dad made that bench, how he hid Hannibal from his dad because no way was he telling his dad he befriended a man six years above his age and "-That I even like men-" He stops, realizing he just revealed far too much than intended,

"You're…gay?" Will's breath picks up and he shakes his head unsurely, a flush rises and all of a sudden he's eighteen again and scared and alone and-, "Bi? Its okay if you like men Will, I have a girlfriend y'know,"

Will pauses, registering what was said "What,"

Beverly shrugs, "Yeah. Im gay, well lesbian…"

"I'm not gay," Will attends, which is true, he's seen his fair share of boobs to know he is certainly not-

"Regardless if you're gay or not, in that story it sounds like you were in love with the damn man. And that's okay, Will..." she adds after seeing Will's apprehension, she reaches for his hand, her fingers are soft like silk, "I'm guessing it sucked seeing him again? Since you didn't seem too happy about it during the forensics lab-" Will sighs, stopping her in her tracks,

"He gave me a painting, and I... I- it's still hanging in my room," Beverly's eyes soften, "He was so special to me Beverly, I don't even know why," That's a lie, Will knew deep down why, just couldn't name it.

"Was it because he was the first man you loved…?" Beverly asks over a mouthful of tortellini, "That's usually significant,"

Will thinks about it, to be fair Hannibal might've been the first person he's ever loved, was it even love? Or obsession? What was so special about him? Is it because he saw Will? Or because he was able to map out every line of Will and draw the worst things out of him? Or was it because he could understand Hannibal in a way he couldn't understand anyone else. And Will most definitely understood people, but it was like he could see Hannibal's soul. A soul that completed his.

"Possibly," Will settles for, "He makes me think of home. I guess I've been… lonely…I have my dogs and Barney but that's about all," He clarifies who Barney is before Beverly asks him how many dogs he has. Will notices she gives a vastly different reaction than Hannibal,

"Jesus Christ, how the fuck do you afford to eat after feeding seven other mouths," she half shouts her question, giving them an unsatisfied look from the couple in the booth over,

"They eat better than I do, that's for sure…"

They continue to spend the night laughing over wine and talking more about Beverly and her girlfriend. Will finds the banter they encounter pleasant and the overall experience warm. She doesn't bring up Hannibal past that, but can tell from Will's somber nature it still affects him, and Will thanks her internally for the avoidance of the topic. By the time they part ways, Will is full and elated.

Shenandoah National Park, Virginia November 15th, 2013

Will is back in his office in the great hours of the morning, mumbling about as he types on his keyboard when there's a knock on his office door. Will looks up and is greeted by Jack Crawford, dressed head to toe in black and flashing his badge like that would matter to Will. An ominous figure is still moving in from behind the fogged glass,

"Graham, I'm here with Doctor Lecter-" in comes the doctor, in an expensive gray winter coat that makes him stand large and intimidating for their second meeting— or maybe it's the black gloves that do that. It could also be his slightly less gelled hair, or the pinkness of his ears given the cold. Or even the fallen snow that has started to melt on his shoulder. Perhaps it's the small smile he gives Will as a greeting, though to be frank, none of those things make him intimidating to the average person; it's tailored to Will, who gulps down air and tries to ignore the simmering in his stomach. "-we need to see some of the trail cams, if that's fine," Jack says, and Will's been expecting this, just waiting for Jack's remembrance of them, "and also we need access to the trails and… well, the snow."

Ah, so Jack is asking him to do his job and plow down the snow off the closed trails, "Which day?" He hands Jack free range of the cam room which is usually used to spot wolf migration patterns and/or illegal hunting. Sometimes they can see a few bear cubs playing around in the snow. That's always nice.

"Perhaps I can be of help?" comes that smooth European voice coated in honey. Will looks him up and down as he yanks on his winter coat,

"And have you do manual labor in *that* ? That should be a crime," Will mutters as he reaches for the keys to the equipment locker. He's ignoring the simmering… poorly.

With a huff of laughter, "I can assure you, I am perfectly capable of manual labor. I take great pride in my fitness, so regardless of my choice in apparel, I can work," and Will tries to not imagine his muscles, he really does, "Is that okay with you, Will?"

"Sure, I don't care," Will hands him a shovel and they walk side by side out the office. WIll throws off his glasses, hating how they fog up in the cold. They silently get into Will's truck, and just like that, they drive just as they did nineteen years ago. This time, Hannibal strikes up conversation;

“Very beautiful in the winter, don't you agree?” Hannibal inquires as the barren bark flies by in the foggy windshield; in his peripheral, Will can see Hannibal staring at him, waiting.

Following a windy road, Will gazes into the white bliss that follows ahead, “Winter’s nice, but I like spring more. Get to see the critters, ‘cause in winter they're all hibernating. In the spring they all come out to breed. Except for salmon, they head upstream in the fall,” Will reaches for his already cold and lifeless coffee that’s attached to some sticky residue in his cup holder, he sips it. Folgers. “Summer’s pleasurable, more campers come. And it never gets as hot as home did,” There's a slight inflection in tone when Will says ‘home’, and he realizes it implies where he lives isn't home, and also implies that Hannibal knows where home is.

“Surely not as humid as Louisiana either, I presume?” Hannibal’s tone is nothing short of pleasant, and Will feels his eyes flutter at hearing Hannibal say that,

“No, certainly not as muggy,” he smiles to himself and Hannibal hums. No word is said after that until they reach the trailhead. The two get out and Will starts to grab the shovels he carelessly threw in the bed.

“It’s a miracle how you’ve kept that truck running all these years,”

Perhaps Hannibal would buy him a newer truck, certainly one far safer… but perhaps that is the charm in Will. His old truck.

Will tersely laughs, “More like hard labor. Figure if I can fix boat engines, I can sure as hell fix mine,” he hands Hannibal a shovel and the older man's eyes light up in amusement. Will takes this time to joke, “Mostly miracles, though.”

The sharply dressed man accompanies the ranger as they start to shovel out the far-too-snowed-in trails; there's no footprints and Will can't even see the ones he left not so many days ago, before he found Hannibal again. The men keep shoveling snow, their surroundings quiet and serene. The occasional song of a bird disrupts their calmness, but no more than that.

“Will,” Hannibal beckons, “Come look.” Will scuttles over to the half-plowed trail Hannibal’s been working on, peering over the man's right shoulder on his tippy toes, their foggy breaths mingling. He smells Hannibal as he looks at the paw prints that laid in the powder in front of them.

Will hums, fascinated by the mere size of them, “Wolf prints,” Hannibal nods, not in curiosity but more as confirming his own suspicions, and Will shifts his blue eyes to glance at the side profile of the psychiatrist, “A big one too, they’re not usually out this far,”

Will pressed into the warmth for a second longer, before shifting to Hannibal's side lest it become awkward. “Fascinating,” is all Hannibal adds.

“I’ve always liked wolves. Love how we can never really imagine just how big they are,” Will kneels besides Hannibal, crouching over and pressing his right hand into the bare snow next to the wolf’s, leaving his own handprint. “Such large predators, so… beautiful,” Hannibal looks down at Will, admiring the way snow clings to his curls and how his beard

has gotten scruffy. Hannibal imagines shaving it for Will, every morning while their hair still drips from the shower.

He crouches next to Will, “It isn't their size that makes them cunning predators, no?” Will smiles, for once feeling like he can outsmart Hannibal, before realizing Hannibal is probably expecting his very answer,

“No,” he watches Hannibal take off his left glove, exposing tanner skin and well-kept nails, “its numbers. They work in a pack mentality, together. They can bring down large animals, like moose.” Hannibal presses his left hand right next to Will’s print that rests left to the wolves massive one, he presses gently into the snow,

“Partnership is always helpful, but it's a mutual understanding that makes it… special,” Will keeps staring at Hannibal's hand, he isn't sure if they're still talking about wolves, “Pack mentality. Is that how you feel about your own pack?”

Will thinks about his little pack at home, whose paws couldn't fill the wolves’ prints; his heart swells with love for them, “Yes, to me they're… my pack,” my family is left unsaid, “It’s funny, whenever I see wolves in the trail cams I always wished I could take one home,” Hannibal’s hand pulls back, revealing a slightly larger hand counter to Will’s, like a reflection. Like their own little pack, Hannibal, Will, and the wolf.

A pack of predators.

Seeing their hands laid together chips away slowly at the abandonment that settled deep in Will's mind, exposing the light warmth of that oh-so familiar admiration and adornment that once occupied the section that is all but Hannibal, “Why haven't you?” Hannibal amuses, he’s well aware of the logical reasons, Will knows, but is asking for the more intimate reasoning, perhaps guilt on Will's end, for caging something so free and violent. Instead Will offers,

“You can’t tame a wild animal.” Hannibal gazes into Will's eyes, and the two men stare at each other once again, kneeling in the snow, knees becoming soaked, neither daring to stand up even as the coldness turns their skin raw, “They will always be feral. I would, in part, have to give up part of my tameness to understand him,”

“And you wouldn't?” Will looks away,

“I would, but not for a wolf. They’re free, I shouldn't bind them to the same civilities we humans have,” there's the guilt, but also a confession. One that works Hannibal's heart, “I can be feral, but a wolf can't be civil. It won't be a real partnership.”

Hannibal nods in understanding, “Those require sacrifice,” Hannibal can do that. He can do that for Will. He will do more for the younger man, soon.

“Yes,” Will stands, helping the other man up, but it is Hannibal who brushes the snow off of Will with his ungloved hand, and it is Will who blushes.

“Perhaps this Wednesday, instead of talking, you would accompany me to dinner? I would be making it of course, simply asking for your attendance…” The psychiatrist has nineteen years

of longing and resentment to make up for, and the sooner he starts the better. Hannibal watches Will, noting how beautiful the winter makes him, almost as beautiful as the green of his marshes. His Will.

“Just us?” Will asks, watching Hannibal's lip pull into a smile as he nods. They stand still, Will's heart racing, hitting his chest with such force he feels winded.

That same bird sings, like the sun and moon used to, all Will adds to the melody is a ‘I would love to’.

They admire the treeline together, as one. Hannibal thinks about how the sky’s blue is that of Will’s eyes; Will thinks about Hannibal's drawing, wondering if he too could capture this moment for Hannibal, and give him a gift of such value as he once did.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed! Comments literally feed me, like a small troll under the bridge.

Goodbye Horses

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for the wait! I had my midterm for business calc and whew that was a lot!
I also have a tumblr, where i post art fir this story lol but idk my password so i cant link share LOLLL
its: strawberrytheperson

also sorry unbetaed again. Pls be kind

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He trotted across the floor

he laid his long gray muzzle

on the spare white spread

and his eyes burned yellow

his small dotted eyebrows quivered

Yes, I said.

I know what they have done.”

—Mary TallMountain, “The Last Wolf”

That very night, where the two men had laid their prints in the snow, Hannibal settled in for the night, reviewing recent charges against hunters on the privacy of his tablet. Many of these men, and some women, were simply boring simpletons who have waited far too many years to renew, a simple slip of the mind. Hannibal knew which ones he wanted, which ones would be exceedingly brute. He can separate man from beast, perhaps better than that curly haired brunette who Hannibal knows is still fighting with himself. What Will had said to him rings in his mind, how he would have to give up his tameness to be with such a predator. Hannibal’s lips stretched themselves into a thin smile as he pondered about his blue eyed creature. A man so carefully crafted as a perfect counter to Hannibal, possibly the only man

who would be able to capture this unknown killer. It brings Hannibal some pride deep down in his muddy dark mind, but he's sure to be weary just as much. He mustn't let his own curiosity swallow him, and risks everything he's so carefully created. After all, this very man could ruin it.

He's collected his organs silently over the years he was a surgeon, and after that some unnamed murders that he never bothered to make an art of. It wasn't until that one night, oh so many years ago, that he felt inspired enough to craft something so heavenly. Some irrelevant professor had taken it upon himself to include Mr. Graham's thesis in his own publishings, of course, when Hannibal read into this "Working mind of a killer" and read that very name that showed him how the moon sang, he had to study it. And so he did. He had read that thesis over and over until he could almost recite it like poetry. Will didn't just understand the 'Il Mostro di Firenze', no, Hannibal concluded.

"He admired me," he calls to himself out loud in his room. A vacant loneliness settles into his stomach, one he hasn't felt since the death of his sister, and he looks into the window on the right of his chair. The moon lets in her dull blue light, drawing Hannibal in as if he was a moth. He waits for her to sing, just as she once did when the two men had sailed out deep in the bayou.

But she doesn't sing. Not tonight. Not until Hannibal has Will to sing her songs for him. He knows he might have to prepare for a life of silence, but the small chance of hearing his songs encourages Hannibal.

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 18th, 2013. 5:00 am

That following Monday morning, the sun rose slowly over the mountains, lighting the snow as if it was molten lava. It awoke the song birds, who sang their melodies, looking for each other. With so many songs, Will wonders how they find each other through the tangled mess of chirps.

He takes a slow sip of his coffee, sitting on his porch while Winston sleeps next to his collie. Buster's in the back barking, probably at one of those very song birds. Will yawns with a closed mouth, allowing himself to sink further into the warmth of his work jacket. He knows today he'll have to spend the daylight hiking in the snow while angry campers add to his list of problems. He thinks about his upcoming problems, and remembers Hannibal's dinner proposal this Wednesday that he so adamantly accepted. Hannibal had texted him that night, proving his theory that he very much could have reached out first, by letting Will know the address of his home, given they would need a kitchen for dinner. Will remembers their hands together in that snow, a runic that Will can't decipher. He looks beyond to where his own property blends into a colorful array of trees and snow, where the melody of the forest

enriches the morning air. He can see figures lining the trees, and he feels that now familiar presence nips at his neck.

Deep in the woods, the Stag calls for him. Will know he's not after a chase. He knows what he must do. To hunt the stag, like a feral wolf chasing and chasing until he is consumed.

It’s a call that disrupts Will’s reflection. Will answers, a curt 'yes’ suffices as the call continues. He's paying attention to the sun reflecting on the snow, he’s listening to the stag's call, he's dreaming of that graying man who pressed his hand next to his. He thinks of anything but the call at hand. Jack Crawford's voice sounds melancholic and Will already knows what’s happened before he can even question. It takes a minor pause before Jack says it himself; A second body was found.

Will settles the dogs in before getting ready to head out, readying himself as Jack's little bloodhound.

He lets the stag watch him disappear, knowing he will be back for him.

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 18th, 2013. 9:00 am

Field agents have spread out by the time Will makes it to the location Jack detailed for him. He looks around, noting Jack standing amongst a mysterious figure in the snow, and will can't help but to scan the heads for Hannibal. He bites back his disappointment as the doctor is nowhere to be found. The body, more a mural, was found by a family leaving their campsite, the mother is distraught and has been screaming all morning threatening to sue for mental damages, Will finds as Beverly sips on a to-go coffee mug. Will can't find the family anywhere, so he assumes Jack's little field agents have settled them down somewhere else entirely. He licks his lips and enjoys the nip of the cold. Beverly sighs.

The mural, from what Will can see, is that of another hunter accompanied by the body of a small wolf. *Most likely a juvenile, perhaps younger,* Will remarks to himself, noting how it was a bullet wound that killed the poor pup, a mangled hole with dried blood that littered the wolf’s neck. The man on the other hand, is not as butchered up as the last one who laid strung on that stag, rather he lay splayed like a trophy rug facing the wolf. Vexed at yet another cruel act. Someone's son, left mangled in the snow between a los grotto that's frozen over. *Someone's child, someone's baby* , Will dwells somberly, as his crystal blue eyes meet the pup's face, he knows he isnt thinking about the man. He can almost smell the vengeance that this mural reeks of, he admires it. Maybe Will is a bad person for feeling this way, but looking at the mangled pup, he does not care what they will think. For he is truly faced with someone so despicable they would kill a pup.

He does note one similarity, when it comes to the use of flora. Where the Stag had magnolia at its mouth, there's now what appears to be a green carnation lying in the puppies teeth, the tiny white fangs delicately curling against the green ruffles Will readies himself for Jack's call.

“Graham, what’s your best guess?” Jack grumbles, Will tries to ignore the eyes trained on his back, huffing as he closes his lids. He feels the dull ache start to bloom in his mind, pulling him in as the pendulum swings. Jack's bloodhound. A dog.

The man in the mural, another young man and hunter had killed the wolf that played in front of him. He knew it was wrong. He knew it and you know too. Hunting wolves is illegal, wrong. But you know that. You see me, but will you let me see you? He killed something sacred, and proper punishment is needed. Do you see my gift, dear? This is all for you. You're here with me but will you accept my love? Do you ache for me the way I ache for you? Can you stand with me, hand in hand, and face the world? I skin this man like a trophy for you, a feature of atonement laid at your feet. We are not sinners, for no crime will ever amount to harming that of the innocent. You agree, don't you? Tell me, tell me and you will find me. Until you do, I will leave sentiments of my love for you, until I hear your call. It's a righteous death, and you know it. We can make him honorable.

Will shudders as he's knocked back into reality, the crunch of snow alerting the rest of the folks that Will is now out of his trance. He feels Beverly staring at him, not in the same morbid fascination the rest do, but in concern, Will doesn’t know he prefers that. Will stops to wipe his face, freshly shaven from this morning, and scratches the base of his neck. He needs a haircut soon, it's getting long. He stares at the man and beast once more. It's a gift, and possibly for him. Hope blossoms and it carries shame. Shame that Will could share such anger with the Chesapeake Ripper, that he could *agree.*

“He… the killer found the person he wanted,” eyes follow Will as he explains, “To him, it's just a waiting game until the other person accepts.” Silence, again waiting for Will to delve further, he clears his throat, “Until he responds… there will be another body. Soon.”

“What do you mean soon? We can't play a waiting game with a killer Graham,” Jack retorts, Will can only offer a shrug, hoping Jack will be satisfied with his answer, or at least take the hint that that's his issue. Jack presses his black gloves into his lips, giving a silent nod at Will, “Give us a list of every park goer… Do you have any idea who he could be looking for?”

Will faces the tundra, seeing how blue it is once the sun creeps out behind the clouds. It doesn't sing, not yet. Will has forgotten its song, its soothes. Instead he has nothing but the stag to hear his cries.

Will’s not sure if he knows, or is merely wishing that the person is no other than himself. His heart screams **ME**, but he can't confirm, he doesn't know who would crave him badly, or why he would be so worthwhile to declare these monuments for. He turns to Jack,

“I’m not sure, it's just someone he or she finds… special,” Jack stares at Will, his brown eyes questioning where Will went for a second, trying to figure out if he got lost in his own mind palace. He settles on a shallow whistle, before he barks some unheard command while he turns away, Will starts facing away again. He dwells on that one word, special. Could he be so special? Will wonders if he too would do something so sincere for someone, maybe then he can confirm. Who would he kill for? The question leaves a bitter taste in his mouth, he licks around his teeth searching for it as he looks deep into the frozen woods.

In the distance, the Stag waits at the tree line for him. His antlers sprout like branches, his eyes shine. Beckoning him forth once again, Will remembers when he cried for it. He feels the wetness of his kiss on his head. Their gazes lock. He knows his fangs will come soon, and Will will have to embark on the hunt, his paws will carry him forward, listening to the endless call:

Hunt me.

“Will? You okay?” Will jumps, leaving a messy pile of snow to be kicked at Beverly’s feet where she stands. She doesn't move at that, instead giving Will a quizzical glare, “Okay… I'm guessing you didn't hear me…”

Will mutters out an apology, unsure just how long Bevelry had been calling out to him. Beverly shakes him off, “I um... No. What were you saying?” Beverly gently reaches out for his arm, her red snow coat brushing against his brown work one,

“That Barney said he’ll handle the report,” They walk arm and arm and Will cannot remember the last time he's been this close to somebody, it's nice. He wonders how Hannibal’s posh winter suit would feel against his poor one. He wonders if he would allow him to dust the snow flakes off his cheeks. Will wonders how it would feel to lick them, “Will? Dude are you okay?”

Will realizes she walked them to his truck, sweat beads at his forehead, “Yeah just… y'know the body and stuff,” Beverly, unlike Jack, isn't convinced by Will’s mask.

“Spill it,” Will doesn't want to implore his casual meet ups with insanity to Beverly, so he settles on the second prominent thing on his mind,

“H- Dr. Lecter invited me to dinner at his house this Wednesday,” Beverly cuts the what would be beautiful silence with a shrieking gasp, giving Will an elated grin while she smacks his arm. He laughs trying to ignore the nervous stomach he's acquired at saying what he said out loud, “Don't get too excited, It’s probably some weird therapy he wants to do on me,”

Saying that replaces Wills nervousness with a tinge of grief, but Beverly’s eyes are still bugging out of her skull as she screams silently for him like a fangirl,

“No, you don't get it, Dr. Lecter is like a messiah at cooking,” They both lean against his truck, “He hosts these extravagant dinner parties that are impossible to get invited to, dude. You're like… is it just you guys?” Will stomachs does some flips,

“I believe so, I asked him. ”

“Holy shit dude, he wants you,”

Will groans, wiping his brows and putting up a front of extreme annoyance to cover whatever sick thrill he's feeling, “Don't see how dinner with my shrink is the epitome of romance,” Beverly shoots Will a sassy glare, before turning away and lightly tapping his trucks side door,

“What happened to him being the love of your life?” Beverly sasses, reminding Will of their conversations at Gammas.

“Did not say I loved him, and also I was eighteen.” Will hisses in an exasperated tone,

Beverly laughs,“If you say so. I’ll be in touch about the autopsy. And please… dress nice for him,” she walks away, leaving Will to get in his truck and drive away before Jack can bother him about something new, and he can get away from a fucking dead body.

Hours go by and Will now is at home for the remainder of the evening, he had been relaxing and enjoying a delicious and innovative grilled cheese made with not one, but two kraft singles, when Beverly had called.

“Yeah you know you get something called a paycheck Will, maybe spend it on real fucking food?” Beverlrey voice was muffled through his phone speaker,

“Ignoring you now,” Will swallows up the last of the bread, “So he removed… repeat that back again for me?”

“Yes his rectus abdominis, external oblique, and internal oblique… or his abs to be short,” Will hums, baffled for once as to why. Before, he could blame the stolen heart of Ryker as an allusion to the ripper's own searching heart, but a guy's abs?

“Maybe he was jealous of them,” Will snorts, and Beverly also gives a sharp laugh of her own. She tells Will that Zeller will be faxing him the reports until Will can set up his own secure work laptop from the FBI.

Will decides to clean up his office while the faxes get sent in, each one causing the very old motors of the machine to scream. He picks up one the reports, admiring it in all of its

confidentiality. It makes him feel, important. Good. He wonders what would have happened if he did decide to take Jack's offer of the teaching position at Quantico, he wonders if his new clearance would allow him to restart again, become an FBI agent now.

Agent Graham, Will sings to himself, how badly he wanted to be called that. But he's old, and despite his well maintained physique due to his current job, Will knows there are limits placed on you once you hit 37. A year too late. His window, gone again.

Will tries not to mourn, sitting lowly at his reception desk that has gotten overgrown with his old tax reports. On the wall in front hangs a familiar painting. It’s faded to a dark yellow, but the linen work is still the same. Will’s stunned.

It's been so long.

He got up, slowly making his way till he could read the fine calligraphy at the corner.
Hannibal

Will laughs at the fact that Hannibal never had signed with his last name, allowing for Will to only use his first. Ironic how now he cannot stand to use it, only addressing him by his title; Dr. Lecter, how far they’ve grown apart these past years. Will, a prospective FBI agent who had a chance to make something of himself, and a future surgeon who evidently did make something of himself. Will continues on his path of white trash. Will turns away swiftly, relaxing, everywhere he looks to reminds him of his failures. Sometimes he wished he never left Louisiana, so he could go deep in the marsh and lose himself. He wonders what would have happened if his mother’s calls were not replaced by that of Hannibal’s.

Will dreams that night.

He dreams of the stag, holding him down by his antlers, pressing him deep into the snow where Will’s fur turns red. They fought, an endless tumble of fang and horn, hooves and paws. They fight until Will’s hands are that of five digits. They fight until the antlers he grips onto are not connected to the stag, but the graying hair of Hannibal. They fight until they're not. Until warmth presses deeper into him and Will can only call out that very name that drew him in. Hannibal mumbles, he cries, until the snow covers them both and Will bites into Hannibals throat.

Will wakes with trembling hands, and a burning hard on that aches and throbs. He groans, trying to keep some dignity and not jerk off to the man he is having dinner with in less than two days. Not even a man, his fucking psychiatrist. GOD.

He rolls over and goes to sleep.

Wednesday morning he awakes to the same fate, only this time he did not save his dignity, and instead like a horned up teenager, pulling his boxers down and fisting at his erection. He let his mind wander back to that dream, to that feeling of sinking his fangs deep into Hannibal's neck, consuming him until they were whole. As the precum leaks onto his fingers, and his strokes become more lazy, he imagines those very skilled hands, pulling at his brown curls, forcing Will to say his name. Will bites his lip, trying to ignore the alarm bells going off in his head screaming this is wrong, those very hands are making you dinner tonight. Will gasps, imagining himself licking up Hannibal's own seed from his palm. Would he allow Will to do that? Would he feed Will his own arousal? Would he force him to do it? Will spills into his own hand with a low groan, allowing the last remaining waves of pleasure to roll off of him before cleaning up, and getting ready for the day.

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 20th, 2013. 7:27pm

It isn't until Will is standing outside Hannibal's victorian entrance way empty handed that he realizes he maybe should have listened to Beverly's advice To be fair, he did try, but everytime he slipped on an old suit jacket he's sure he got from Payless, he felt like a dirty southern marsh boy trying to be someone he was not. Instead, he wears the nicest flannel he has, some work brand that Barney and his wife had got him last Christmas, and an older work jacket that he polished just before he left. He tries to rub off some of the fur that had collected around his gray slacks, bending down with a grunt and failing to notice the door had swung open in response to his knocks. As he looks up, dark auburn eyes greet him.

"Good evening, Will," Hannibal himself was of course dressed to the nines, the only source of looking human was the apron on which bore what seems to be flour. Even his cooking apron was nearly impeccable, "Please do come in," Hannibal allowed himself to scan Will up and down as he brushed past him, smelling a faint honey scent, beneath a god awful aftershave.

"I'm sorry I came empty handed," Will started, observing the somewhat dark maximalist style Hannibal has decorated his home in. Will was very much, out of place, "I don't mean to be rude."

"Nonsense, I asked for your company and nothing more," Hannibal gestures for Will to follow him, the taller man leading the other into what Will could only describe as Martha Stewart's wet dream. Beautiful kitchen that outshines Will's very… cozy one. Will smells a faint fennelly scent, and what could only be described as potatoes. A large pot sits simmering

away, Will doesn't dare enter the actual kitchen area, and Hannibal doesn't say anything. Hannibal leaves Will, reaching for some glasses in a cupboard nearby and pouring Will what seems to be a white wine. Will doesn't like wine very much, but decides to keep that to himself, and instead sits at a chair that Hannibal has pulled back for him at a counter where he could watch Hannibal work. The whole setting is odd, Will notes as he sips the wine. Sweet.

“I am preparing Tartiflette Savoyarde, which should be done by eight, giving you time to enjoy your wine.” Will reaches deep into what french culture he knew, but can't seem to figure out what it is, Hannibal notes his confusion, clarifying as he chops up a few cooked and peeled potatoes, “This is a traditional alpine recipe, consisting of creamed potatoes cooked with wine and bacon, broiled in the oven. It’s sweetness should help counter the Bouillabaisse I have prepared earlier for us,”

“So… Potatoes Au Gratin,” Will offers, trying to wrap his head around the fact Hannibal made Bouillabaisse, so familiar yet so foreign. When he finally looks up he sees a neutral expression on Hannibal’s face,

“Yes, but some minor differences,” More chopping ensues as Hannibal turns to face the stove, “Pairs lovely on a cold, snowy day in the mountain, which I assure you encounter very often, no?” Will blinks at the back of Hannibal's head, realizing Hannibal chose a dish specifically for the line of work Will does, he feels almost guilty he's sitting and doing nothing for him back.

“You get used to it,” another sip, “Bouillabaisse?” Memories of the fishy broth fill Will’s mind, “Fish stew, my dad used to make that sometimes. He always added fennel though,”

He doesn't see Hannibal watching him, “Is there a problem with fennel?”

“Never really liked it,” Will sips the wine, finally realizing Hannibal had turned to him. His glasses have fogged from the heat, making it impossible to see his face,

“Unfortunately that is how it is traditionally prepared, if you may, you can skip that and I can ma-”

“No No!” Will jumps out of his seat waving his hands in a defensive manner, “I'm sure it's gonna be lovely, please I can only be so grateful you've made this for me at all,” Will hears Hannibal stepping closer to him, nothing but the simmering and the footsteps fill the room. Oh and of course Will’s nervous Breathing. Slender hands gently pull the frames off Will’s face, forcing Will to make eye contact while Hannibal wipes the glasses on his apron, successfully de-fogging them before placing them once again on Will’s face. Will doesn't think he’s even breathing.

“There, and very well. I'd hope you find it adequate,” Hannibal doesn't move,

“Beverly said you’re a great cook, I have no doubt in my mind it… isn't,” Will's mouth has run dry, and Hannibal can smell nothing but that wine and aftershave. Hannibal smiles politely. And makes his way back to the stove, leaving Will very dumbfounded.

“Would you like help?” Will asks.

And so, that's how Will found himself in his own apron, pressed up against the stove as Hannibal from behind guides his hands as to how exactly to stir the cream so it doesn't curdle. He keeps talking into Will's ear, his heavy accent reminding Will of what exactly he did this morning. Will’s beard scratches at Hannibal's chin, an oddly domestic feeling the both of them ignore. Hannibal gave no indication of discomfort, his voice keeping a sterile teaching tone as Will tries to be normal and not get a boner cooking. Hannibal’s crotch every so often presses into Will's behind, and Will's head feels even more on fire than it usually does.

Hannibal finally pulls away, noting a sudden scent of honey filled the room alongside them. It's much stronger than it had been when Will had walked in, and Hannibal notes it's more of a musk, so he out-rules shampoo. Behind that lurks the feverish sweet he can name, but withholds from doing so. He will ask more later.

“Will, let me try the sauce, use that serving spoon on the towel to the right of you,” He commands as he checks on the Bouillabaisse that has been simmering. It looks divine, and Hannibal allows a bit of pride to fill his head. He’s uncertain if Will remembers the stew that once brought them together, but he enjoys it regardless. The brunette has brought the spoon to Hannibals face, using one hand to cup underneath it in case it drips. As Hannibal pulls forward to lap at the sauce, the faded scent of honey fills his nose the closer he gets to Will's hand. Perhaps a lotion?

Hannibal adds some bacon he’d cut up, and Will swears he might orgasm from the smell of it.

The rest of the time leaves Will feeling dizzy, so many turns and fast movements as things sear, stuff gets taken out of the oven, and Hannibal uses his hands to guide Will’s every step. He had even taken time into rolling up Will's sleeves for him, in a professional manner he tells himself.

By eight thirty the two men were sitting in Hannibal's dining room, each with their own serving of the stew and potatoes. They don't sit across, rather Hannibal sits at the head while Will is at the right of him. Will focuses his blue eyes onto the flaking fish his spoon pokes at.

“Anything interesting at the park today? Besides the reporters I’d assume,” Will notes that he has yet to talk about the killings with Hannibal, and he will as soon as he tries the stew.

The moment the red broth coats Will’s tongue, he's transported back to New Orleans, winter nights as he begs his dad not to add the fennel. It tastes just like his dads, of course richer than it actually was. He looks at the reflection in the spoon, upside down he can almost see his dad’s face. He can almost hear his voice. He feels his throat get tight and he bites his lip to prevent any tears,

“It tastes just like his,” Hannibal's eyebrows quirk up, “My dad’s. It's just like when I was a kid, of course we were poor so this is much more elegant and di-” Hannibal shakes his head, but Will continues “My memories tend to exaggerate the greatness of what I remember, but Hannibal, you’ve made it as if he’s here. Like I'm tasting a… memory. I'm glad you kept the fennel, it wouldn't have been this great without it,” Will doesn't notice the omission of the title, but Hannibal does. Will does notice the tear that has slipped down his face as he avoids Hannibal’s direction, and Hannibal pretends he doesn't.

“It's good to connect with our inner child, even better to celebrate those in which we love,” Hannibal's therapy talk cut a cold knife into Will.

“Is this some weird tactic?” Will says before he can stop, Hannibal pauses to wipe his mouth on a cloth,

“I’m sorry? I'm not sure I understand-”

“Like some exuberant way to get me to ‘heal inner traumas’. You must be one hell of a doctor to slave away for hours just to do this,” Will knows he's being rude, and for no reason. If Hannibal had decided to do this as a form of treatment, he should be thankful to have a psychiatrist who cared this much about a patient's well being. But Will’s offended, offended at the possibility that he really is nothing more than a patient. Hannibal raises his eyebrows in a curious manner, before resting his hand over Will’s, seeming to aid in calming but doing the opposite,

“I can assure you that was not my intention Will, I simply wished to make you the meal you caught the fish for. A thank you, in fact. Regardless, I was not aware your father had made this dish for you. ”

The words ring softly in Will’s ears, and he slowly turns to face Hannibal. He stares into the doctor's eyes, trying to understand what was said. And then it hits him.

New Orleans.

The fish he caught. The marsh. The fireflies.

Hannibal made bouillabaisse. He’s paying homage to their meeting. He’s thanking Will.

Shame and guilt shoot through Will's veins, realizing in horror Hannibal had slaved away all day as a thank you. Hannibal was being nice. Will's cheeks burn a bright red and he tears his gaze away, slowly standing up in an attempt to leave because he’s not sure what else to do, Hannibal remembered him and Will was a total dick about it.

“Oh H- Dr. Lecter I apologize that was rude and uncalled for. I had just f-” Hannibal stands as well, gesturing for Will to sit once more. And he does.

“Will, please, I am not offended. I do understand the slight hiccup, but please. It would be ruder to waste my food.”

“Yes, but It was rude of me. And I had assumed, it-”

“Will.” Hannibal sternly says, keeping a straight face. Will dumbly nods, shrinking back into his glasses and waiting a moment before he continues eating. He thinks of something else to bring, attempting a few small talk options in his head before settling on what he does best; Heavy topics that have no place at the dinner table,

“There was a body. Another one. Some guy killed a wolf pup and well the ripper… killed him,” Hannibal continues eating. Will awkwardly continues, “He left a green carnation,”

“Love. One of the first symbols of homoerotic love,” Hannibal declares.

“I’m sorry?”

Hannibal puts down his fork from the potatoes, “Oscar Wilde had used it to show love for his lover. Another man.”

“Are you saying the ripper is gay?” Hannibal watches Will, and Will laughs at how similar this is to the convo he and Beverly had had at Gammas. Only the ripper was Will. And the gayness was his obsession for the doctor. The doctor that is feeding Will as they speak. Who pressed him against the counter with his hip and spoke into his ear. Beverly is gonna scream.

“Is that what you believe?”

Will fumbles with his thumbs, thinking about what exactly he believes, “No, he… he was searching for someone. And this time he found them. Maybe someone he loves…”

“Perhaps a man?” This time it's Will’s turn to watch Hannibal. His mind beams at the chance. The chance it might be him the ripper wants.

“That… would make sense. But why this? Why punishment as a declaration of love?”

“That is the question for most things, no? Why do what we do for love,” Will watches Hannibal sip the soup. Some would slave away all day on a soup for love, some would kill classless people and tear out some sort of body part, for love. It's all for love.

“Then what does Magnolia mean? From the stag,”

“Perhaps it symbolizes something, something between the two?” Hannibal offers, acting as if his advice was merely speculation, “Tell me, Will. How does it make you feel knowing someone would go through all of this, just to find their other half?” Will allows himself to speak freely,

“Angry,”

“Why so?”

“Angry knowing no one would ever do that for me,” Hannibal gives Will an oddly gloomy look,

“Would you do it for someone, Will? Is there someone you would kill for?”

“I don't know,” But they both know he does. They sip their wine and eat their meal in silence.

“I think if someone truly loved you Will, they would tell you to change that aftershave,” Will laughs,

“Keep getting it for Christmas,”

“Please let me get you a new one,” Hannibal would, but Will doesn't know that.

Will musters the courage to ask Hannibal if he would go ice fishing with him. Hannibal says yes and gives Will his personal number.

When Will leaves, carrying a Tupperware full of leftovers, and some scraps that Hannibal insisted he give his dogs. Will nearly cried at the fact he won't be eating another kraft single for at least two days. He had told Hannibal about that, and Hannibal flat out denied knowing what a kraft single was. He asked Will if it was a special “Vermont” cheese, Will also nearly cried at that. He told the doctor it wasn’t really cheese, closer to plastic. Will thinks that's the first time Hannibal showed emotion that night, in the form of disgust.

Hannibal hangs his apron. He detects the faint scent of that honey, and he breathes it in. As he cleans the dining room, he looks at the dog fur left on his chair. He chooses to not clean that.

When Will gets home and settles in, he looks at the moonlight that breaks through his window. When he holds his breath and no noise is made elsewhere, he can faintly hear her

song.

Chapter End Notes

Wheeewwwww pls comment it makes me feel good and write more

also ik Wills bday might be november 20th, but for this fanfic it will be the 26th

The Uncast Shadow of a Southern Myth

Chapter Notes

Sorry its a bit short, the next chapter is planned and it will be much longer... this pone had to be shorter because I dont want to rush the next one!!!

Also sorry I've been gone!! Ive been insecure of my writing so I held it off, and then Ive gotten extremely Ill with strep throat, and with finals near im dying. My break is soon so expect more frequent updates!!!

Un-betaed

His body is of man, his head is of wolf.

He hides in the sugar cane fields, looking for you,

When he finally gets you, all you can taste,

Is the sweet molasses of a summer day.

Will wakes up at some odd hour, perhaps twelve or four in the morning, he doesn't remember what the face in the mirror is supposed to look like. He can't quite feel his hands, all he can feel is a deep and feral hunger. He can only consume. His teeth are sharp, they tear into fur as the moon beckons him further and further into insanity. Will is hunched in the kitchen, over the hard tiled floors digging through whatever contents were in the fridge like a rabid dog. In the back Buster and Winston whimper, but Will only eats more. The stew and leftovers Hannibal made have been ravaged, whatever is left splattered around Will as he groans in pain. His head pounds deeply, the only gateway he has of feeling human. He can't even think, it's just pain and hunger.

Every time he bites into some random produce, he can taste the metallic flavor of the stag's blood. Consuming so he wouldn't leave. Will whines and whimpers, heartbroken knowing he's consuming his mate, but he can't help it. He'll do anything to ensure he never leaves again. He will hunt.

Some morning Will finds himself half-naked and standing in the snow outside. His feet burn from the snow, leaving his digits red and raw. When he looks around the empty field of his

backyard, he can see his clothes thrown haphazardly in the snow. He’s freezing, and somehow even more exhausted than he was the day before? What day was it? Will looks around for his pants, finding them laid on top of a frozen bush, scrounging out his phone and finding it to be November 21st, 6:43 am. Will attempts to put on the pants, noting that they seem to have been originally wet and had frozen over. He claws at his hair, debating if he should even attempt smelling them. He does and is greeted with the smell of piss, he begins wincing and throwing them down. Enough feeling has come back to realize it's also the black boxers that have been pissed on. It dawns on Will that he pissed his fucking pants.

“What the fuck,” he groans, collecting all his articles and running inside for a shower trying to remember what happened. Just as he's walking in he’s greeted with what could only be described as… hell. One of the dogs tore into some frozen meat in the freezer, making the kitchen look like that of the murders. Will almost drops his clothes, holding his hand over his mouth to gag as the dogs whimper and cry around him. Will trained them, they don't do this, he might cry in frustration.

They never do this, his dogs are good. He doesn't do this- He looks at their beady eyes circling around him. Winston whines. It's too much for Will.

Heart heavy, Will heads upstairs, and the warm shower he draws for himself does feel good, but does not aid in regaining his memory. What he remembers is the feeling… a deep hunger he can't satisfy. He brushes his teeth, looking in the mirror at himself. He looks rough, to put it kindly. His hands are shaking and he decides on whether or not he should even attempt shaving. Realizing he looks horrendous, he risks the trim. It’s not a close shave, merely lining up what was already growing and leaving some for insulation from the cold. When finished, he grabs at the scissors that rest on the top of his cupboard, and without much thought, snips away at his hair. Its overgrown, and by the time Will’s complete its much more manageable but the layers are all fucked up and Will still sees the horrible nobody he will always be. He wipes his face over and over, hoping maybe it will change and he'll be looking up into eyes that are not his own.

Will dresses, going downstairs to deal with whatever havoc the dogs got into. The dogs, usually happy with wagging tails, greet Will with bowed heads, certainly showing their guilt. Will really isn't sure how they got into the fridge or why he woke up naked in a field, but noticing their avoidance of their master turns Will's stomach. He gathers some plastic bags, normally used to cover any boat motor he has lying around in order to prevent the dogs from licking crude oil. He laughs a bit at the dogs, trying to joke them into coming closer, but they won't. They stay bowed. He stares at Winston while the laundry whirs in the back, his piss soaked clothes washing. No one moves.

Eventually it’s Will who breaks this staring contest, the forced eye contact makes him realize he’s lost his frames somewhere in the house. He gets closer to the now thawed meat, and he sees no paw prints in the blood. In fact, the teeth marks that have been used to tear open the plastic wrap show flat molars and dulled canines, that of a human. He envisions the bite, feeling each and every tear as his mind reconstructs what had occurred. Will’s breath is shallow, seemingly drowning as the realization dawns closer and closer. His pink lips reveal white teeth as he opens his mouth to scream, but nothing comes out.

He can't scream, his mouth is filled with raw meat and his brain is on fire.

He scrabbles out of the kitchen, the dogs now barking loudly at him as he paces around sweaty. Memories rush into him, small glimpses of blood and sweat, of hunger and the moon. He is a mad man, a rabid dog.

He calls Dr. Lecter's office, making use of his office hours that Will recalls reading on some business card handed to him days ago. Perhaps weeks, Will has lost all sense of time. When the call announces its outside his office hours, and to call back between the hours of 10:00am and 5:00pm, Will keeps pressing redial. He wonders briefly if he should call Beverly, or Barney, tell anyone what has happened, but his heart settles on Hannibal. He's a professional, he tells himself. On the thirteenth call, the line finally goes through. Will should hang up, but the adrenaline that courses through his veins prevents him, and he waits.

“Good Morning, Doctor Lecter speaking” Hannibal's divine voice settles deep in Will's ears, the softness of his voice only ignites the fire in his mind, coaxing a stronger burn.

“I've gone mad,” Will states, and nothing more than that. There's a small staticy shuffle on the phone, Will bites at his pale knuckles, noticing cuts that weren't there previously,

“Will?”

“Doctor I-,” Will sighs, sitting down on the couch, watching Winston slowly approaching, his fluffy tail layed low behind him,“I have no idea where to even start,”

“Wherever your mind allows, Will.” another shuffle, “I have all the time for you, even if you must take hours to begin,” Hannibal responds a bit too cheery for Will's liking. His calm demeanor claws at the worry in Will's mind, but he takes his time in responding. Maybe a minute of silence on each others end before Will allows himself to speak freely,

“I think I have a tumor, or something. There's something in my brain that's making me crazy. Mad. It's a cancer in me that it's just growing until I can't think. I wake up at random hours not knowing how- or who or what I’m doing I-" Hannibal remains silent for Will, “I’m seeing things,”

The confession only confirms Hannibal's original speculation, that Will was sick. Encephalitis, specifically Anti-NMDAR Encephalitis, was a distinct feverish musk that coated the poor man. It didn’t disgust Hannibal, no, he wouldn't say that, in fact far from it. Hannibal considers omitting his conclusion from Will, so he may savor that sickly sweet scent forever. Similar to the currants he had picked back in his birth country, a faded memory brought forth from the calm awakening of a man whose eyes carried the deep snow of a forest. The red dripped down his sleeve, like blood it trickled, staining his clothes.

“What are these visions?” Hannibal diverts from his own repressed memories, “Do you suspect them to be visual hallucinations?” Hannibal notes Will's uneven breaths staggering more and more as he thinks.

“I’m not sure if they’re real, the last remaining sanity in me tells me they're not but… there's, there's a chance Hannibal.”

Hannibal expresses a small smile from hearing his first name, the drop of authority creating a sort of intimacy to their call. But Hannibal is a doctor, before anything else, and so he shifts the phone into speaker and begins to write some notes in a notepad to the left of him. The dark pen writes over his patient Franklyn’s notes, so even though he is a doctor, he's a human first. A human who chooses not to care about this small unprofessional detail.

“What are they depicting?” Hannibal asks again, savoring Will's trembling voice as he begins to speak.

“The Stag.”

“A stag? As in a male deer?” Hannibal clarifies, noting down Will's use of a title for this creature.

“He… he shows up… in front of me sometimes,” Hannibal can hear a bark in the background as he jots down the new use of pronouns,

“He?”

“He.” Will breathes out,

“Why he? You phrase it with such control, Will. Do you believe him to be sentient?” Will tries to fight his dislike of mental probation.

“No, maybe. I'm not sure,” Will starts, “I think it's more out of…respect?”

“Respect?” Hannibal echos. Will looks to the window on his right, the sky has turned grey and blue, casting melancholic shadow to the land. In the blue thickness he can feel him watching,

“Yes. He means… he is something,” there's a fond quietness, a weight that lifts off his chest allowing Will to breathe again with the confession, “He means something to me. He's been in my life for so long, in my mind. It's like he was always there.”

“What does he mean to you, Will?” He. needs to feel whole, without the stag he is lost, he is clueless, he's just a marsh kid who hides in the reeds with the mind of a killer.

“Everything.”

The words bounce off of Hannibal's office walls, and the weight of them sink into him like fangs gnawing at bone. Everything. Does Will know what he means to him? Could he compete with everything? Is it a battle that's already been lost?

“And how does that make you feel, Will?” Hannibal follows up with a professional manner.

“Hurt.”

Will feels his eyes staring at him through the window, “and loved. I feel he loves me.”

“And what does your body tell you to do?” This question strikes Will as odd, it's not a professional question like the others have been, instead it bodes more of an interpersonal feeling, it's like a boundary to be crossed. but it begins to make him question, had his ravaging antics been because of the Stag?

Will decides to confess, as if it's a confession box and he's in the most intricate Church, as if there's a priest on the other end who's going to hear him of his ailments. To Will, Hannibal can be that Divine entity to heal. Will wants to rid of his sins.

“My body tells me to hunt, to consume him.” Hannibal sharply inhales, Will notices this, and a wave of heat crawls up him, and now there's no eyes looking at him through the window, “my body tells me to be one with him, and I fear, that is the only way I know how.”

More silence ensues, and Will begins to question if he had said the right thing- does he ever say the right thing? This question had boggled Will's mind for decades, since his days in Louisiana he's wondered if he's ever done the right thing. Should he have stayed there? Should have taken Jack's offer? Is this even his dream? Will he accept the Chesapeake Ripper’s court?

“Why did you call, Will? What provoked this?” Reality sets back on Will, and then a tired sigh as he begins to detail exactly what led up to this call. How he became someone he wasn't, not even a person, a creature with fangs who ate to consume another. Hannibal is delighted at this, he hears himself talking to him through the phone, he hears himself in Will's voice, that same carnal ache that courses through him is bleeding from one another and muddling together. As Will continues forth with his descriptions of ravaging through packaged meat and waking up naked and cold, he mentions one final thing that leaves Hannibal breathless,

“Every time I wake up and I realize it was just a dream, I feel…. incomplete. I feel dissatisfied… that my hunt was unsuccessful.” A warmth blossoms in the European man's chest, a full, warm ache that hasn't left him yet now it ignites: Hannibal aches.

“In our previous conversation, Will, recall the one we had at dinner,” Will does recall this, in fact if he closes his eyes he can almost taste the soup that Hannibal had slaved all day for. It reminds him of his home. It creates that very same ache Hannibal feels. He yearns. “We had mentioned what others would do for love.”

“Yes,” Will straightens his back, his shirt scratching as the cushion of the couch presses into it. Winston wines and Will reaches out to pet him, noticing that he's calmed down.

“Do you love the Stag?” The words shock him, as he's never really questioned if he's loved back. It makes his lips numb, it makes his fingers numb, it makes everything numb but the thump of his heart because when he thinks about that stag, he only sees the young European man he met so many years ago.

“I don't know,” Hannibal presses further,

“If you do, is that how you show your love? You hunt for him? Apparently that is what you concluded about... The Ripper…”

“Technically I'm hunting him,” Hannibal nods knowing that Will cannot see him, “And is that really love? At least an expression of it, if it is him who I'm harming?”

“Merely for the act to be one with him, so who says he can't take that as love?”

“Would you, Doctor?” The answer comes faster than Will anticipated.

“It couldn't be one-sided, I would have to know that person very deeply to even consider doing that. To take the life of someone, it's a sacred act. You would know that Will. You must honor them, and to honor someone that I would think so lowly as to kill, would require the utmost admiration for who I will kill for. Would they do it for me?” Will's cheeks burn as they turn the same color of that soup Hannibal had fed him, a beautiful ruby. Will ponders at Hannibal's words for a while, he lets them marinate as he carefully constructs a response. It makes him think about the death he has witnessed, in his woods, in his second home, and it makes him think about the courting. It works, and Will in his ravage state just might accept it. He doesn't know how, and he won't tell Hannibal. Not yet, he still has hope that maybe Hannibal will do it for him. He knows how he needs to respond but he clings on to his denial so that he may have the chance to respond to Hannibal, as frivolous as childish as that is.

“I believe that this is a stress response due to the line of work you have suddenly put yourself in, it’s not something the average person could do so suddenly, especially one like you whose mind is so… intricate. So tell me,” Hannibal details, “Do your visions include the crime scenes? Do they give you any insight into the case? Could they be sprung on by this case, Will?” The question cuts through Will's slow thinking, and as if an ice bucket was dumped on him he goes cold once again, reminding him these sessions are for the case.

“Maybe,” he hums, “ I…. didn't really… I don't know where my head's been…” That dull ache starts to come back and Will's reminded that he's talking to his therapist and a confession of love does not await him, “that would explain the Stag now that you mention it…”

“Yes, but I don't believe you see the Stag as the victim, not far from that. Do you see it as the perpetrator Will?”

“Are you saying my mind has got me dreaming of the killer as a reincarnated deer?” Will answers with a slight attitude, bitterness dripping from his words, “But how would that explain… I'm not in love with the killer, Hannibal. I don't want any association with someone so… evil.”

“And yet you've spent the past few weeks dreaming of him,”

“The Stag isn't the killer,”

“Then perhaps humor me, could it be because the killer's love language is… hunting?.” this time Hannibal's words truly ruffle Will’s feathers, knowing Hannibal just may be right but his morality is to deny.

“I…it's… not just that…” Will feels that headache grow into frustration that clouds his mind, and the pain starts to fill his bones,

“Perhaps you are the killer in this dream…?”

“That's actually a good possibility,” Will takes this into careful consideration, tossing the idea a few times around his brain, “But he's killing to show off to someone… I'm not… I'm hunting to.. Consume. He’s a flashy bird doing a mating dance and I’m… like a…”

“Praying Mantis? The female kills their mate after mating to supply proper nutrition to their offspring,” Will chuckles, “Yeah, but my hunger is… loneliness,” Winston snuggles closer, Hannibal smiles.

“I'm not the same man I used to be, I'm different I'm… I'm not him,” Will changes abruptly while Hannibal jots down “possible abandonment issues” onto the notepad,

“ Is this a good thing Will, or are you ashamed of the man you used to be? " Will seethes, swapping the phone into his other ear and allowing the now warm cell phone to press against his cheek,

“I'm not ashamed, I’m just not him. Are you the same person from when you lived in fucking Russia? Or was it Transylvania?”

“Lithuania,”

“Oh my apologies Lithuania,” Will thinks, slotting a pause, “Do you miss it?”

“To an extent,” Will smiles, “There were things I recall that I was fond of, but the passing of my sister tainted most of it. I’m sure you could say similar about your father,” a frown spreads on Will’s face,

“I’m sorry about that," Hannibal hums, he needs no pity from Will, but it's expected and appreciated, “But my dad’s memories don't really… make it sad…,” *yours do*... “I dream of it sometimes, I miss it.”

Will nearly drops the phone as Bella now comes up to him, seeming to notice Winston’s happiness and needing pets as well, Will obliges, “but I'm just… I'm sorry…”

“Alright Will, for our next session I would like to ask more about these visions, if you may keep track of them?” There's nothing on the line but their breathing mixing for the next few seconds,

“Ah… now you're truly making me your patient.” A small chuckle comes out from the speaker, and relief settles in Will’s demeanor as he realized his strangeness may have not affected the doctor as much as he thought it would,

“No, Will, to me you are my friend.” Hannibal pauses, “Does the moon still sing?”

That one question pulls at Will’s heart strings, and plays them like a harp for the world's slowest ballad. His eyes burn and he almost cries at the mere mention. But it isn't the same.

“Yes,” He finally answers, “But she calls me into madness now,”

“From what you said it's like-”

“A wolf.”

“A wolf?” Will waits patiently as Hannibal writes something down, if he focuses he can hear each distinctive scratch, “Mild lycanthropy, perhaps from the last body"

Hannibal clicks his tongue, "Please let me know any changes, continuously. I will possibly reach out to check in. I may use my personal number. Will, you are not my patient, I would be glad to talk to you as a friend.”

The call ends civilly, the two men both with their respective consent to reflect on. Will is going insane, but at the same time he's revealing exactly who he needs to be.

By mid day, Hannibal has seen two patients and is ready to unpack his lunch when a knock disrupts his peacefulness. Before he could even stand Doctor Bloom is barging her way in, Hannibal's eyebrow raises in surprise

“Alana-”

“This is wrong Hannibal,” her curls bounce as she makes her way across the office, her red infinity scarf reflecting off of her blue eyes. Her pools of ice remind Hannibal’s of Will’s, yet somehow Will's are the only one to make Hannibal's blood run warm,

“Ah,” Hannibal sets down his belongings, gesturing to Alana to sit. Her daisy scented perfume is pleasantly muted, contrasting her very angry appearance, “I assume we are talking about Mr. Graham”

Alana scowls, “Of course we are Hannibal, you and I both know what Jack is doing isn't appropriate, and you are condoning it!” Hannibal looks away,

“He is a retired detective, and besides, his skills and ability to understand the human min-”

“He is a citizen Hannibal,” She folds her fingers in her lap as she sits down in front of him, the dark office making her glow, “He’s a park ranger,”

“That is law enforcement,” Hannibal counters, and it only earns him a deep scowl from the lady,

“He’s an interloper, he has no place here Hannibal. I have yet to give Jack a piece of my mind because I'd expect something so foolish from him… but you??” This time she lets her betrayal be known, and Hannibal tries to put on a calming face,

“I understand your concern Alana, but I can assure you he is handling it well,” Alana looks down, “He knows what he's doing, he’s more capable than most,”

“Is he actually taking it well doctor?” Hannibal thinks about the freshest conversation, and the fact Will at some points during the night believes he’s a wolf,

“Yes,” She sighs,

“I wont tolerate this still, it's unethical,”

“He can quit anytime,”

“Yes Hannibal I’m aware, but with Lound’s article he must fill the pressure to perform,” Lound’s article had put a lot of emphasis on the park ranger’s inability to prevent the murders, and that must affect Will’s psyche to an extent, “This might be his only way he knows to do his part, and I’m not stupid Hannibal, I know who he is. I know how he can get in their minds… that can damage him,” It can. It might.

“I can only offer him help in that journey, he is a grown man… It's his decision Alana…” Hannibal watches her as she stands up,

“He doesn't need to suffer like this Hannibal,”

“He’s not suffering,” She bites her tongue, reeling back on her heels and allowing the taps to echo, perhaps she will talk to him herself, “He’s marvelous,”

She pauses, slowly making eye contact with Hannibal, “...He’s not your lab rat, Hannibal.” he smiles, teeth showing but his eyes do not reflect that same emotion,
“I will keep him safe Alana, that is what my job is for him,”

“I will be in contact with Jack, Hannibal,”

And with that she storms off, leaving Hannibal alone once again. He can't say he’s mad at her, no, she is technically doing the right thing. But it's not what Hannibal wants, he needs Will here, with him. They need to consume one another, put an end to their courting. He can't let Will go, not yet, not until he gets a response.

Oh how long that will take him he's not sure, but when it comes he will be ready. He’s waited twenty something years, he can wait many more.

No Other Heart

Chapter Notes

sorry for wait, been busy. Hopefully u like this!!!

But the side of you they'll never see

Is when you're left alone with your memories

That hold your life together, like glue

“ This is the day” by The The

Shenandoah National Park November 22nd, 2013

Will shows up late to work… again. This time it isn’t Barney who greets him at his office doors, rather a big bushel of red curls is standing between him and his desk. The corner lamp, its shade consisting of white linen that has faded to yellow has been turned on, its orange glow lighting up the woman's hair into a low glow-like ember.

“Late?” She questions Will as he steps into the pine scented room, but leaves no space for him to answer, “Seems a bit precipitous given all the murders, Mr. Graham.” Her sultry voice somehow makes Will’s headache throb even more, and he takes a careful moment considering his words, but his head is elsewhere. He can, though, recognize her face from that parking lot outside the forensics building, how she managed to get in there is a mystery he isn't up for. How she got in the office is not a mystery, Barney tends to be a bit absent minded to who he sends back into Will's personal section.

“Prec- Oh, yeah no, um…” Will takes a moment to sigh, looking down at her black rider boots and comparing the leather of his own boots to hers, “I had a therapy session,” not quite, “well, more counseling- Can I help you Misses… ?” The world counseling makes the ginger’s eyes light up with excitement, and Will realizes the mistake he made and plans to be more cautious with his words for the sake of him and the park.

“Lounds, Freddie Lounds,” that's right, she had exclaimed that rather loudly at Will at their first encounter, “ and truly Mr. Graham I just want to ask you a few questions abo-” Her demeanor plays as innocent, but will see right through that stitch when he remembers the original public outcry.

“No.” Will cuts her off, debating shoving past her and her brown leather jacket so he can grab the spare radio that rests in his desk drawer-

“Is it true they are using your mind, Mr. graham?” Pausing, Will infers that ‘Them” means the FBI, he decides to let those words settle low in his gut, his crystal blue eyes peering through his lashes and frames to finally make eye contact with Lounds,

“I’m sorry?” he rhetorically asks, both can play that game of asking stupid questions with no answers. Lounds takes a seat at the spare chair that is usually only used by Barney when they eat lunch together, its green felt had slowly become more brown over the years, so has just about everything else in his office. Fading and muddling in the background, just like Will himself. At least, until now.

“I’ve read your papers, Graham, and did some digging of my own since you denied me last time…” she sang, scanning his face and looking for him to give in and listen to her. With his shoulders dropped in unease, she had won this one battle.

“This meaning..?”

“I know what you are, Graham. From your empathy disorder down to your bastard birth, and even your new psychiatrist.” Though ‘Bastard’ rings in his ears, Will's heart leaps at the last word, and burns the memory of their previous phone call, the intimate nature of everything. He swallows deeply, brushing his tamed beard, “In fact- I got word that big old Jack Crawford has been wanting your mind for quite some time now… but you said no. Why now do you say yes?” More labored breathing is emitted from the brunette as Lounds simply watches his chest rise and fall. Will tries to focus on the peeling wallpaper, how its green nature pattern has become obscured with rips and tears of white.

Why did he say yes? He knows why he said no in the beginning, at least that's what he tells himself. Perhaps his dying father was his excuse to not put himself through torment everyday. It was his excuse for a selfish choice. But now he has to face that selfish choice, torment his mind for the sake of other lives… but he also knows that's not really why he said yes this time either. He knows that when he looked into the eyes of that stag, he felt it calling him. He felt that same boundless search he did for his mother in those marshes,As a young child with oil stained hands. that same boundless search he did for Hannibal's voice in his memories, A new thing to look for and never find. He felt that the Stag was meant for him, and it is his job to find him, and single him out. A feral urge to be satisfied.

“I realized I can save lives, do something… useful with my existence. But I'm sure you wouldn't understand that, now would you?” Lounds side eyes him,

“Delivering news to the people is important, especially when the rangers are doing such a… miserable job at preventing deaths around here… That's what Graham, two deaths now? Any minute now some poor unfortunate soul is gonna get stabbed and-”

“You and both no that's not how the ripper works,” Will counters, allowing debacle, stuff he shouldn't say, but his pride swells. Pride for a killer, an awful human. Lounds raises an eyebrow,

“He picks them specifically?” Will is going to regret speaking, but his brain is foggy and he can't stop imagining Hannibal's voice urging him to go on.

“Yes… a punishment...” Will sighs exasperatedly, “Now I beg of you Lounds, this is stressful enough,” and to her credit Lounds does get up,

Will’s phone buzzes and he reaches deep in his pocket to check the vibrations. Lounds chimes something to Will but it falls on deaf ears, for WIll has just read who the text message is from. A random number, but it states:

Hello Will, this is Hannibal, have you been feeling better?

Will completely forgot about the damn radio he was supposed to grab, hurriedly sitting down with a loud thump to his side of the desk, grasping the phone in his hands as he stared at the message. He spends some time creating a new contact and trying to keep his cool. He types out a few responses before settling on one,

Will: *Yes I have, thank you for asking.*

Wills fingers tremble as the reply is almost instantaneous,

Hannibal: *Of course. Please call if you start to feel unwell, do not hesitate as you will not be of a disturbance.*

Will: *Will do.*

Hannibal: *Good, as for your invitation to ice fish, does this Sunday work? I am unfamiliar with this type of fishing. I have only done it once as a young child.*

The ranger takes note that there's ice fishing in Lithuania. He also notes that he will be seeing Hannibal Sunday. This Sunday.

Will: *Yeah that works, If the lakes aren’t frozen enough I have some frozen fish from my last catches that I can make for us. Unless you prefer to not try my horrible cooking.*

Hannibal: *Regardless of the nature of the meal I will be glad to enjoy it with you.*

Will: *Sure, I'll send my address*

Will: *Meet me at 10*

Will: *A.M.*

He puts down the phone a final time, a warm glow spread along his bridge, looking at a small wooden carving of a wolf that rests next to that corner lamp. It's tiny, made of what he assumes is oak, with small teeth barred wide. It looks at him with its carved out eyes, a deep unsettling stare until Will grabs the radio and leaves. Outside he covers up Lounds’ heel prints in the ice with his own.

A few rangers from the northern side of the park had stopped by where Will was to inform him of a few bear sightings, and let him know to be wary of wolves in the area. Will had taken this information in with his eyes glued to beyond, deep in the snow. In fact, wherever Will goes he keeps his eyes locked on where he waits for the stag to appear. He doesn't today. His absence unsettles Will more than his presence.

Snow falls as Will takes a small break on a log he brushed off so his brown work pants wouldn't get wet with melted snow. His breath fogs the air, similar to how the heat would blur his view back home. The more obscured he makes it, the more he can make out his dad sitting on that bench on the porch that he took a small cig break for. Will closes his eyes with a delicate flutter, feeling heavy as snow begins to collect on them. Through the visual snow he makes out a foreign place, but an oddly familiar voice, one low and feminine.

No, not tonight.

He can hear his dad chime in, his Yat accent so heavy, unlike Wills,

M'not a dumbass…

He can't make out that name

I know-

I saw y'ur bags w-were packed…

He can see the linoleum tiles, deteriorating from their use. He can feel the itchiness of his wool sweater. It always made him scratch at his neck till it was raw.

The boy eight … that same name he can't make out… *he gonna remember this*

The woman sighs, Will watches her black kitten heels reflect dully at the door.

I'll be back in a day-

Yain't packed for a day…

She ignores him, and makes her way to where Will stands, but he keeps staring at her shoes.

Baby…

Will looks up, but her face is distorted, blurred and obscure. He can barely make out her brown curls, the same as his.

I'll be back baby…

She pressed a cold kiss to his head as he smelled her perfume for the last time. He can't remember what it smelt like. When the door closed he felt his dads warm hands cover his shoulders, bringing him in for a tight hug. They had stood for a long time in silence, neither one moving a muscle. Will's heels had ached from being in the same position for so long, but he held on for his dad.

I love you, Will.

Will awoke from his trance, noting the snow in his lashes had melted from the warm tears that dripped down his face. He swipes them away with a quick brush of his gloved thumb. He remembered his mother, a figure he blocked out from his mind since Louisiana. But he didn't cry for her today.

No he didn't cry, but he acknowledges the ache she left. Since that day in Baton Rouge he's been waiting for her, and he knows she will never arrive.

He cried instead for the voice of his father, that man who moved him into a house, and tried to give him the best life despite his drinking problem and despite their finances. That man who told him he loved him no matter what, who forgot his name when he got old. The man who raised him, whom Will cared for till the very end. Nothing he did would ever amount to what he did for him.

He looks up to stare directly at the stag, who's been watching him since he sat down. Will stares at him tenderly, knowing he too shall soon leave him.

But not now, and if he hunts, not ever.

Hunt me.

Will rests his eyes a final time, before standing up with a crunch and turning to face the non-official trail he went on. As he's leaving the area as his phone begins to ring, he picks it up with his now gloved hand and answers without checking the ID,

"Hello?" Will scruffy answers as he makes his way into his truck, noticing the red and white leather needs reconditioning as he slides in.

"Hey handsome, how's it being a rugged lumberjack?"

"Ah Bev," Will holds the phone with his shoulder, closing his door and checking his mirror before starting the car, "What do I have the pleasure of talking to you for? And also, that's not my job-"

"Well Jack and I wanted to know if you've seen anything in the park? I know some of the field agents come by every now and then but they only check out the areas of interest… any reporters or…"

"Actually yeah," Will diligently swerves past a pothole, "Lounds came by the other day."

There's some clunking noise on the other end, "You're kidding, who let her in?"

"Barney, most likely. Actually I haven't really seen Barney lately so I don't know…" That's a good point, for as late as he is most days thanks to his restless sleep, he hasn't actually seen Matthews. He should probably call him, or knock on his office and see if he's in.

“God she's like herpes, can't get rid of her. You didn't talk to her right?”

“...”

“...Will? You didn't talk to her right?” Will sighs,

“I- she somehow knew stuff- God I caved in”

“Holy fucking shit what did you say?”

“Just that the ripper doesn't pick his victims randomly…”

“Oh my fucking god Will, you can’t say anything!”

“I know I’m sorry-”

“Fuck… don’t worry I’m sure ... I’m sure it’ll be nothing’”

“Will it?”

“I don't know… depending on how she twists our words, your park could be screwed—Well not actually… maybe just a bad Yelp review— Kidding of course… It'll probably be a bad news report but I digress-”

“Guess we'll have to wait and see”

“Guess so Graham…”

Will waits a few minutes embarrassed, listening to Beverly shake around what he would think is an iced drink,

“So…” She sighs this time before squealing loudly enough for Will to almost drop his phone,

“You never told me about the dinner!”

“Oh yes, that.” Will tries to fight the burning in his cheeks.

“What do you mean THAT! Tell me what happened…”

“It was very civil, though I know you're probably disappointed in that-”

“Civil? Well no shit Will it's a dinner not a porno— though I know YOU'RE probably disappointed in that aren’t you?” Will bites his lip and ignores any of the images that brings, he parks his truck as he pulls into the office. But leaves it on so he can't talk for a bit longer,

“Shut up, and well, he invited me in and we cooked most of the meal together-”

“He had YOU cook? Don't you live off of kraft singles-”

“Shut up again, and yes I do… do not cook. Depends on the dish.’

“What'd he make?” she asks,

“Well I helped make some bacon dish that was delicious—God it was great actually–he made Bouillabaisse-”

“Doesn't that shit take likes eons,”

“Yeah.. didn't know you cooked.”

“A girl has hobbies, Will, but for Hannibal that's a lifestyle…” Beverly contemplates for a second, “ Wow, he made that for you?”

“Yeah we uh…” he takes a bit longer to answer, allowing himself to settle into his seat more, “...kinda had that back in Louisiana together… technically the first dish he’s made for me…” Will answers sheepishly,

“...”

“...What now?”

“He remembered that? Graham he’s in love with you.”

“He is not-”

“He is-”

“—Not.” Will looks at himself in the mirror, his eyes are dull and he has large bags under them from his lack of good sleep. He really can't imagine anyone loving him right now.

“Sure sure,” Beverly brushed off, “ was he all up on you while cooking though?”

“...”

“... Oh my fucking God-”

“He had to be Bevs. How else is he gonna—”

“—Did he smell good?” Will considers this,

“For cooking fish all day he smelled great,” he barely whispers, ashamed of his own answer. Beverly laughs and they talk a bit longer, Will updates her about Sunday and she nearly blows out his ear drums.

When he gets into his office, he takes the time to knock on Barney's door but he isn't in there. Shooting him a text results in a response though,

Barney: *Sorry man, out for today!*

Will smiles relieved, with all these things going on it's good to know he has Bevs and Barney.

And possibly Hannibal.

Shenandoah National Park November 24th, 2013

Will spent his Saturday at the park, working on moving some lumber around. By night he had purchased a few new ingredients to stock in the fridge in case they caught anything on Sunday. Now it's 8 a.m, and he's looking at himself from a fogged up mirror due to his recent hot shower. His muscles are more defined right now, as he stretches his abdomen out he can barely trace some abs below a small layer of fat. He looks built, healthy, and fit. He checks himself out a bit longer, noticing his very light chest hair has some grays now, and his beard needs some lining up. He opens up the medicine cabinet, holding up his blue towel with one hand as it stretches across his hips, and digs around for some ibuprofen to help ease his never ending headache. Though Hannibal had said it's most likely stress, the degree in which he feels this pain makes him wonder if something else is going on. He closes the cabinet, allowing himself one last look to his face before turning away to get dressed.

Will walks downstairs in a black beanie, winter boots on with spikes for the ice—he knows it's bad for his floor, but he doesn't really seem to care about that anymore—, and three layers of clothes. A bit bulky, but if he and Hannibal are going to be on the ice today, he better layer up.

The reminder of who exactly he will be spending his time with today flips his intestines inside out, and he mindlessly cuts up the dog's food. The dogs themselves wait around Will, nudging him to work faster and spreading even more dog hair on him. He allows himself a small laugh, taking a few trips to finally distribute the food, and continuously shower them with love as they start to finish off their breakfast.

Some more time is spent eating his own breakfast, a scrambled egg with a melted kraft single on top, before gathering some supplies for the trip out today. He pauses as he grabs his second rod, red and dusty from no use, and ponders if he should bring one of the dogs to get them out. His thoughts are interrupted by a knock on the door.

With his heart clenching and borderline nausea, Will checks his phone time, displaying 9:32 a.m. Hannibal's early, but what else is to be expected from a man who's constantly wearing a suit, Will thinks as he heads to the door. He takes in a deep breath before pushing it open.

"Good morning, are you William Graham?" comes from the delicate voice of a beautiful woman who stands on the white of Will's porch. Will studies her blue eyes with long lashes that have been painted darker with mascara, long brown hair that's been curled neatly and tucked behind one ear. Will looks down and sees burgundy snow boots that match her gemstone earrings.

Furrowing his brows in confusion, "Just Will please…" She half winces in an apology, her red lips curling into a straight smile. Some lipstick had smudged on her canine, Will finds that charming.

“My name is Dr. Alana Bloom, may I come in?” Will starters a second longer, before turning his head back to see Winston on the couch,

“Yeah, just give me a second.”

They find themselves sitting on Will's dining room table, for Will declared the couch dog hair infested. They sit awkwardly facing each other, though Dr. Bloom hides it more. Will watches her fold her hands neatly Into her lap.

“So you’re a psychiatrist?” Alana unfolds her hands and lays them flat on the table as Bella wines in the background.

“Yes, unsure how you knew that, unless Dr. Lecter told you about me.” Will forces his eyes not to react to that name.

He watches her eyes track his nervous tick, “No, maybe he mentioned it in passing. I can tell because you haven't stopped analyzing me since I walked in,”

Bloom looks away, breaking the gaze she was attempting to hold with Will to no avail, he really should have put on his glasses today, “Ah yes, Not fond of them?”

“No.” He winces internally when he realizes how rude that came off as.

“But you are seeing Dr. Lecter?”

“It’s not therapy. And if it was, isn't knowing that a HIPAA violation?” To this she actually laughs, melodic and contrasting to what Will would think is his whiny voice.

“Dr. Lecter hasn't told me anything. Crawford told me he recruited someone for the… Ripper case, and I assume if you didn't come to me for clearance and sessions, Crawford must’ve sent you to Han- Dr. Lecter.”

Something ticks in his brain, “Hannibal? You're close?”

Bloom looks down at her hands, “We are past formalities, yes. Occasional dinners. I'm sure you also have work friends, no?”

Will tries to decipher the burning ache in his spine, clawing at his throat and itching his lungs.

“So you’re the other psychiatrist…” he reinforces.

“Yes,”

“Why are you here exactly?” Winston has come up and started to rub himself on Will's pant leg. Guarding.

“I actually wanted to talk to you about… the case.” Will gives her a questioning look before she continues, “It has come to my attention that you are not FBI.”

“Yes… but Crawford-”

“I know what Crawford said," she cuts, “Look Will, I want you to know I come from a place of concern. I don't think you should be putting yourself in these… situations. You have an empathy disorder, yes?”

Tilting his head, “I don't think that concerns you Dr. Bloom…” She bites her lip in irritation,

“I understand why you would feel like that, Will, but please just listen to me. To have them… use your mind like this… it isn't right. It's dehumanizing to you–-”

“Don’t I make that decision?” Dr. Bloom takes a small breath before ignoring him.

“You aren't a trained professional, Will, I won't stand for Crawford using an innocent person for this—”

Will clears his throat, leaning forward and scratching Winstons ear. “You don't know me, Dr. Bloom. In fact, I don't appreciate you making these types of decisions for me. I’m a grown man, doctor. I’m sure I—”

“I'm not calling you incompetent, Will, I'm just advising that you—”

There's another knock at the door, this time the timing of each knock is even, precise, and thoughtful. Dr. Bloom and Will look at eachother.

“I’m sorry, were you expecting visitors?” Dr. Bloom innocently asks, and that burning ache resurface as Will realizes what he’s about to let in.

“Yeah, uh… give me a sec,” Will leaves Dr. Bloom with Winston, making his way to the front door with each wooden panel squeaking under his weight. The dogs follow him as he goes, but he manages to shoo them away to the couch. He checks his phone again, resting his head against the door before opening it. 10:00 a.m. Right on time.

Will opens up to a way more casual Hannibal, his hair isn't neatly slicked to the side, instead is a bit frizzed from what can be assumed is hat use, and his coat appears to be made for more practical purposes. He’s even wearing work gloves instead of his fancy cashmere or leather. He smiles at Will, his sharp teeth glinting at Will. There is a hat clutched between one of his hands, Hannibal took it off for respect. The other holds what Will can assume is an expensive brand of Riesling.

“Bonjour, Will. Your doorbell isn't working.” Hannibal grins.

Wills mouth parts slightly, and a vibrant red adorns both cheeks. He tries to ignore how his pants become a slight tighter at the sight of Hannibal, and he takes a second to recollect his thoughts. Then he remembers Dr. Bloom.

“Ah, Bonjour…” Will doesn't even remember the last time he spoke french, and he's scared to even try, “Uh… one of your colleagues stopped by… she's uh, inside.” Hannibal raises an eyebrow to Will as he turns to let Hannibal inside. They both make their way to where Dr. Bloom is sitting, upon sight of him Dr. Bloom stands up to greet him.

“Oh, Hannibal, I didn't expect to see you here,” Hannibal smiles at her while Will grinds his teeth,

“Good Morning Alana, the same can be said about you.” Through a statement, Alana and Will both know he's asking for an explanation. She turns to Will for help, but he keeps staring at Hannibal.

“Ah yes, I had just came by to talk to Will about a few things…” Hannibal sets the Riesling down on the table, “Am I interrupting something?”

“We’re going Ice fishing,” Will answers. He can't take his eyes off Hannibal.

“Yes, Will is kind enough to host a dinner for us as well. Hopefully we,” he turns to Will, “manage to have a successful hunt,” Will stares somehow more intensely, a strong Honey scent filling the air once more.

“Ah, I do love your dinners Hannibal. Can't blame Will for wanting a place at that table,” Alana giggles, Will bites his lip.

“Will and I have already shared a delightful dinner before, he's one of the best guests I’ve had.” Hannibal states with too little emotion for Will's liking, but enough for something of confusion to spread onto Alana's face. Will start to feel guilty. She changes her expression in an instant,

“Ah, my apologies. I didn't know it was usual for you to be this acquainted with patients,”

“I’m not his patient–”

“He’s not my patient, Alana.”

A tense silence ensues while Alana tries to understand the energy in the room. It seems the only person who knows what's happening is Hannibal.

“Well… I should be leaving now…let you boys go fishing,” Alana starts to make her way back to the door, “Hopefully you host one of your dinners again Hannibal, it would be great to have Will attend one of your dinner parties,” She sings, but Will notices she's attempting to lighten up the mood. Hannibal allows it.

“Of course, Alana… I’ll be sure to brew you some batches,”

“Brew some batches?” Will inquires, taking a moment to dart his eyes between the two. He notices a cheeky glow on Alana's face,

“Ah yes, Hannibal knows I don't like wine, so he brews me homemade beer. Just for me—oh what a great host he is,” Will turn to look at Hannibal, he only nods.

They both say goodbye and wait a few moments quietly for Alana to leave. They don't speak or move until they can see her car drive off in one of the windows.

Just how close were Hannibal and Alana? Had all this time passed that Hannibal chose to find partnership someplace else? Will's stomach turns. His mind turns into the darkest corners for a second, re-living a fever dream.

He's turning me into this, into this thing. Everyday I wake up in the mind of a killer and all I see is him.

"What did Dr. Bloom talk to you about, Will?" Hannibal breaks Will's train of thoughts. He looks at the other man before turning to grab the supplies they need.

"I'll tell you in the truck."

Just like that Will is driving Hannibal in that same truck for the third time, calmly enjoying the smooth jazz on the radio. It buffers from time to time, depending on how large the pines are as they drive,

"So she asked you to drop the case?" Hannibal implores, Will scowls,

"Essentially. She talked to me like I was some inconsolable kid who Jack manipulated into working for him,"

"But you're not," Hannibal deducts, "You chose this yourself, making a decision based on your morality, no?"

They turn right at a stop sign, waiting for an SUV to go. He turns to Hannibal, "I guess, Morality and pride can often be swapped with one another…"

"You do this for your pride?"

You do this because you seek it. He is you, Will… at the same time he calls for you… and you yearn back…

"It looks good doing the right thing, besides if I said no, I would just be some useless fuck who can't control his park…"

"Being in his mind allows for control then?"

"It allows for me to… not be in control. A senseless feral wasteland where my consciousness goes to die."

"But by giving up your conscious for him… it is in a sense—"

"My control." Will huffs, "y'know if someone like… I don't know … let's say Beverly, if she hears our conversation she wouldn't have a clue what's going on…" Hannibal laughs,

“Beverly is your friend, yes?” Will nods with a smile, “Well I am sure I would not get the same enjoyment from your conversations with her. Partnership is about mutual understanding, even in friendship.”

Will parks the car just outside the lake, noticing a few others parked as well, meaning the lake is frozen enough to fish. He rubs his face and puts on his beanie, Hannibal doing the same, “Yeah because we’re friends.” Will drawls sarcastically.

“We are. No?” questions Hannibal. Will aches, realizing he wishes for more.

“Yes,” there's another pause, “Come help me move the gear and we can set up.”

The frozen lake has turned the landscape into a flat basin of white, with broken color every so often where someone else sits fishing. Hannibal and Will's footprints showcase all the paths they took just for Will to find the right spot. Upon finding so, they proceed to spend a grand total of three hours ice fishing in almost complete silence.

“When do you think the Ripper is going to claim another victim?” Will asks, Hannibal looks up at him from where he had just struggled to reel in a Trout with no victory,

“When his heart tells him to do so again.” Acceptable answer for Will.

They managed to reel in an adequate sized Pike, along with some smaller trouts that Will would freeze or use to feed the dogs. They talk sparingly on the car ride back, mostly about Will again.

“Would you ever move back to New Orleans, Will?”

“Depends, but being a Fish and Game Warden over there is a lot to ask for. Gators and stuff…”

“What if money wasn't an issue?”

Will laughs, “like a sugar daddy’s taking care of me?”’

“Perhaps, or maybe you form a partnership with someone who could… take care of you.”

“Or lottery!”

“Yes or lottery,” Will wonders if he would. He does miss it…

“I don't know if I miss New Orleans, or just the memories I had. It's like trying to live a life that's ended… I’m a different person now,”

Hannibal glances at Will, “What's different?”

“Just… me.”

“Do you hold the same beliefs? With honor?” Will tenses.

“...yeah.” Hannibal doesn't push further.

“I do love how you pronounce New Orleans, Will. Reminds me of our first encounter.” Will gives a crooked grin, blushing.

“Ah yeah, can't shake the accent fully…though I’ve tried.”

“Ah yes, your observation that those with more… southern accents are deemed as less intelligent.”

“Ding Ding." Hannibal lowers the radio station, Will doesn't mind.

“I wouldn't assume less of you. I never did, you always registered as an intelligent individual, unique. You stuck out in a sea of faces..” Will is gripping the steering wheel tightly enough for his knuckles to turn white. “Do you still speak french?”

“Not really, Haven't had the need to use it since… Maybe college?”

“Vous sentez-vous incomplet?(Do you feel incomplete?)” Will hums in confusion for a second, taking his time to analyze what was said.

“Non, pas avec toi.”(No, not with you.)

Will is too busy focusing on the road to see Hannibal redden.

They get back and diligently transfer the Pike and Trout into Will's personal freezer, his wood floors becoming ever more torn with their constant use. The dogs follow Will around, but do attempt to show Hannibal some love. Will notices him avoiding the dog's attempts to be pet, their fluffy tails slamming against Hannibal's leg.

“Not a dog lover?” Will calls out as he opens the door for Hannibal to bring in the rest of the gear. He watches Hannibal come closer trying to fight off Winston who's started to try and herd him,

“Never been acquainted with many…” Will laughs and shoves everyone inside.

They both undress into their final layers, a fine red cardigan with black pants for Will, and a cream sweater with a pair of slacks nicer than anything Will has in his closet for Hannibal. The time reads 4:00 p.m.

“Guess I should start dinner, huh?” he asks Hannibal, turning and opening the fridge to pull out the basic ingredients he bought.

“May I be of assistance?” offers Hannibal, Will shrugs.

“You can start chopping the onion, though I don't have aprons, so be careful.” With a nod, the two begin their separate busy work; Will filets the Pike while Hannibal chops the veggies Will has asked for. This feels even more domestic in Will’s quaint kitchen.

“We’re making Chili,” states Will as he pulls out a red dutch oven, placing it on the the stove and turning around, “Sorry if thats— Oh–”

Auburn eyes meet blue, as Will realizes Hannibal was right behind him. He waits for Hannibal to take a step back, but he doesn't. They can hear each other breathing. Will wants to reach out and touch Hannibal's hair, where it lays soft across his forehead, to play with the brown and gray strands that turn it into something so elegant. Instead he grips the Stovetop, pressing back into it as Hannibal takes a step forward.

“What are you sorry for, Will?” His accent is even more sultry, letting Will hitch a breath. He can smell Hannibal's cologne, dark and woody and enough to make Will choke.

“If… I’m sorry if it's not… as sophisticated as… you were hoping for.” Hannibal blinks softly, before taking a step back and turning around to finish chopping.

“I am your guest, Will. I am thankful for the food you provide.” Will takes a moment to regulate his breathing.

Will might just kill him.

As the Chili cooks slowly on the stovetop, the two men sift through Will's dusty record collection drinking Riesling. Hannibal watches as Will picks a vinyl up and dusts it off,

“Riesling pairs with fish, no?” Will probes, clicking his tongue as he dusts the vinyl.

“It pairs with white fish, I assumed that's what we would catch today.” allows Hannibal, Will turns away from him, shifting his weight as he attempts to start the record. The needle’s broken, but he knows he has a replacement somewhere. He begins to dig for the box,

“You brew Dr. Bloom her own beer?” Will hears the clank of a glass as Hannibal sets down his cup,

“Yes, it is part of being a good friend… are you worried I would not do the same for you?” Will shrugs, “What are you worried for, Will?”

Will finally finds the replacement needles, shooing away a nosey Bella once again. He hooks it on as Hannibal waits for his answer.

“That you’ll leave.”

“Like your mother?” Will bites his cheek,

“Like everyone.”

Gentle music begins to play, Hannibal stands, walking forward to Will.

“Why do you think I’ll leave?” Will turns back to him

“You have before.” Hannibal offers a hand out, Will takes a moment before accepting it.

“A Room With a View” by Russ Morgan and His Orchestra, begins to play softly. Warm chords fill the air.

“And If I do? How will you cope, Will?” Hannibal swoops his arms under Wills, the blue eyed man registered he’s staring a dance,

“I can’t dance,”

Hannibal pulls Will, their steps matching the pace of the music, “I will guide you,” Will looks down, avoiding his face, “How will you cope, Will?” he repeats.

“I don’t know,” Will presses himself closer to Hannibal, allowing himself this moment. It's warm, the chili smells good, the dogs are watching, Hannibal holds him close, “Do you dance like this with all your friends?”

Hannibal smiles, “Dancing is a great pastime, it is bonding. Each partner must fully trust the other for the dance to move smoothly, even more trust is needed in a group setting, where one is expected to move synchronized with the rest.”

“You didn't answer my question,” They spin around slowly, the dance not intimate enough to not require twirling of any kind. They dance like partners, not lovers.

“You did not answer mine. Answer before I,” Will holds on to the small of Hannibal's back. Feels muscular. Fit, like Will. Perhaps more given their difference in quality of diets.

“I truly don't know,”

“No, what do your dreams tell you,”

Will looks up finally, looking directly at the other man, “Dreams are dreams.”

“They provide insight into what we truly want,”

“Beverly told me once she dreamed she turned into goldfish, what does that prove?” Hannibal interlocks his fingers with Wills, using his right to grip Wills hip.

“Perhaps she feels trapped? Needed a change of… environment.” They both laugh at the absurdity.

“In my restless dreams…” Will pulls this time, “they tell me if you leave… I would… kill you.”

“Kill me? How so?” Hannibal remains unfazed, perhaps that's what made them so compatible despite their clear differences. Southern trash, and whatever Hannibal classifies as. ‘Perhaps Royalty?’ thinks Will.

“I would consume you,” Hannibal's grip on Will’s hip tightens, Will presses closer and grunts into Hannibal's chest. They no longer dance as partners.

“No,” Hannibal whispers into Wills ear,

“No?” muffles Will.

“I do not dance like this with all my friends.”

The song ends, and both slowly separate, “Am I like him, Hannibal?” Will asks while looking off into the kitchen where the stove makes cluttering noise.

“Are you like who?” Hannibal’s voice commands Will to look at him. They soak in each other.

“The Ripper, do you think I'm capable of the same evil he is?” Hannibal breaks gaze, looking down before flicking up to Wills lip.

“The normal person does not often think of such things as you do, at the same time the normal person does not spend much of their time in the mind of a killer.” Will stares at Hannibal’s lip.

“Does it scare you?” He asks, before looking away once more. They break apart, facing each other.

Hannibal shakes his head, “Not at all. Does it scare you?”

Will doesn't answer, instead leaving to set the table.

The food wasn't bad at all, Will wonders if Hannibal tweaked the recipe he may have found online years ago when he wasn't looking, but it doesn't bother him. Will details more about fishing over dinner, while Hannibal does the same for cooking. They both smile, interested in one another’s stories.

By the time Hannibal leaves it’s 8:30 p.m. Will watches him drive off in what appears to be a Bentley.

“That bastard has a Bentley?” Will mutters to himself. He closes the door, with his heart in his throat, a fever that won't go away, and a million questions racing in his mind.

A Blurry Dream

Chapter Notes

TW:

Both would Consent, but we must remember Will is technically delirious so this could be read as dubcon

Baltimore Maryland, November 25th, 2013 11:24 a.m

The windows in Bedelia's home office force Hannibal to squint as he faces his blonde colleague, or as she would consider, his psychiatrist. Hannibal, who reaches perfections the ordinary man will never experience in his lifetime, is still prone to a small headache from too bright windows. It would be rude to ask her to close the curtains, and even ruder if he does it himself since it implies he has little respect for her or her individual space. He folds one leg over the other, clasps his strong hands together, inspects the fine creases on his plaid suit pants, and bites his tongue.

Bedelia's blonde hair stays perfectly in place as she reaches over her crossed lap to put down the water glass she has just sipped from, her cardinal lipstick forms a crescent on the rim. She takes a moment to swallow, once again her hair-sprayed hair makes no signs of moving as she leans further back into her white chair. Her office is very drab and gray in color. Suggesting to add more color crosses Hannibal's mind, but he has more class than that. The black silhouette of her dress is washed out in such a bleak and heavy environment.

"I am concerned about one thing, Hannibal," Bedelia watches as Hannibal leans back, sitting straighter and inhaling deeply. She notices his squinting, but does not do anything to help, "the last time you guys had spoken was nineteen years ago."

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder," Hannibal suggests. Bedelia's painted lips draw tighter.

"Yes, however it concerns me if you are projecting a specific… image onto this man. One perhaps that did exist at a certain point, when you were both young adults, but no longer exists to this day. I doubt you are the same man you were nineteen years ago, I do not believe you should expect him to be."

"You are right," Hannibal admits, " he is not the same man he used to be. He is something more." Hannibal grins but the blonde does not return the same smile.

“‘Something more’ is what you are seeing out of your nostalgia colored lenses, Hannibal. You want to be his friend so much, it scares me what you will do to ensure he is what you desire.”

“Are you suggesting I am manipulating Will?”

“He is your patient, Hannibal.” The older man looks down at his lap, following the stripes in each plaid pattern with his eyes.

“He is not by technicality.”

“He trusts that you are looking out for him” with a tut she asks, “ Has he come to you for any medical advice? Especially when it comes to his own psyche?” Hannibal remembers the call they shared,

“Only as a friend. Not as an expert. He did not reach out through my emergency hotline,” he lies.

Bedelia’s sharp eyebrows furrow in suspicion, “Assuming so, you told him the best advice? Not something that would benefit you…correct?” Clever girl, she's catching on, but Hannibal would rather not jinx his plan while it was working quite beautifully.

“Having him healthy, both body and soul, is my desire.” There is some truth to this, however Hannibal needs Will to be ready to give up his tameness, even if that means pushing Will’s mind to the brink of madness–to show his true nature.

“You mentioned he has an empathy disorder, which is why Crafrowd sought him out so diligently,”

“That is correct,”

“So he can enter the minds of others and replicate their said behaviors perfectly? Oh but not just their actions, no that's not enough to make you this… obsessed” Bedelia’s icy eyes stare straight into Hannibal's amber, “He can understand how they… feel. And perhaps even why’.” Bedelia quizzes.

“ He's able to understand them more than you and I ever can, yes.” jabs Hannibal, staying put in the exact same position. They hold gaze for a few more seconds,

“Do you think it is possible that what you seek from him, what you find so compelling about him, is the possibility that he is a mere image of you?” Hannibal clicks his tongue, “ Perhaps your mind has imprinted on him that day you met?”

“He would have to spend a lot of energy and time to become me. And if he has been living as me for the past twenty years, is that no reason to believe that is who he is now? Why break his psyche and force him to live as a new man? If he were to be imprinting on me, though, it would most certainly be as of recent.”

“Is there a recent reason why he would be spending so many hours in the mind of Hannibal? Besides being—I am sorry–NOT being your patient.”

Of course, Will has been forced to be in the mind of the Chesapeake Ripper the past few weeks, Bedelia may make a point there. Regardless, it does not explain the darkness Hannibal saw the day they met. That is different from his own, it's something derived only from Will. Something invigorating, something so raw it sends warmth up Hannibal's spine.

"He isn't a mirror image of me," Hannibal ignores her previous inquiry, "rather his personality compliments each aspect of mine. He is something I seek for in both partnership and friendship. We are both sides of the chessboard, completely separate entities with reflecting qualities."

Bedelia looks away, focusing on the gray carpet to her left, "I would just like to know that you are not going to behave recklessly because of this man, and if you are, to seek partnership elsewhere."

"Who else would I possibly want?" Bedelia frowns.

"Make sure he is safe, Hannibal, from what it appears he is an honorable man."

Baltimore Maryland, November 25th, 2013 8:08 p.m

Hannibal's home stood in silence, save for the soft scratches of charcoal to paper. Not a word has been spoken from the older man's lips since he got home from his office. All evening Hannibal's mind was filled with the endless babble of different patients, stretching from the grandiose rants of narcissists to monotonous soliloquy of a sociopath. Neither one as interesting as his dear Will.

Sycamore bark gets shaded with various pencils and brushes, each stroke gentler than the last. They form a treeline, the thicket enclosing what appears to be a flower field. Meticulous strokes carve a delicate figure of a man, who bares no features yet and can only be described as fair.

Hannibal's figure was stark against his lavish walls, for he bore simple garments that did not correspond with the color scheme he had originally picked out when decorating his space. He mulls over how Will would affect his spaces, if he will carry his style with him. Perhaps Hannibal can designate an area in their house where Will may coat the floors in as much crude oil he wants. As for his dogs, surely Will would never give up such loyal companions, Hannibal would have to fork over room for them somewhere, outside, preferably. Perhaps not the small ones, he has faith in Will's training of them to make them be adequately behaved.

Of course, this would all entail if Will would answer his courting. As much as Hannibal would enjoy, as one would say, a normal answer of perhaps chocolates and flowers, he needs Will to give him everything. Even if it requires taking everything from him.

Shenandoah National Park, November 26th 2013

Will's work day has been filled with both headaches from this mysterious chill, and a few nuance calls from Jack asking him if anything has happened in the park as of late. Will tries, adamantly, to be the best of help he can with Jack, but it's hard holding a phone while shoveling snow from the entrance to Skyline drive.

He returns to the warmth of his office and the smell of takeout carries him forward to Barney's door. He looks at the oh-so-familiar bear sign on it that reads "Come in!" with such excitement it really makes him wonder if Mrs. Matthews chose that. He knocks once before entering, meeting brown eyes and a huge grin that sits at the red desk.

"If it isn't Graham."

"Barney." Will rips off his beanie, leaving a nest of curls as he shoots to his second usual chair, the scarlet one Baraey was gifted at a banquet that sits forward of him. Barney's melodic laughter makes the atmosphere warmer; That with the alluring scent of that takeout makes Will's eyelids heavy. Barney leans forward, his fleece jacket making a zipping sound as he hands Will a white styrofoam box.

"Happy Birthday, Graham." Will opens the white styrofoam to greet himself to chow mein, nowhere near authentic.

Will laughs and catches the pair of fused wooden chopstick Barney chucks at him, his calloused palms snapping them in two as wood splinters into the air, "Thanks man,"

They slurp their noodles with a slow pace as they talk about meaningless things, like a new TV program or Will's new detergent that seems to do a better job at deterring Winston's infectious fur. They don't talk about anything serious or philosophical because they don't need to. They could speak no words and Will would feel content. He chews down on some msg covered beef and broccoli, and he wonders what exactly Hannibal would say to this meal. Would he frown and detail all the glorious traditional foods he could make for Will instead. Will would allow him to implore, soaking in each word like sunshine. Would they cook together, holding each other close? Would Hannibal smile for him, would he feed his dogs the scraps? Would they say those words he's always tasted, sweet as sugar canes and warm like that afternoon sun.

"Will?" Barney tosses a crumpled napkin at Will's forehead, causing dark brown eyebrows to scrunch and a grunt to be emitted, "I asked if you wanted to have drinks at Franks? Around Nine?"

Will pauses trying to stomach the butterflies that were beginning to form, "That old bar? yeah that sounds nice, and " allowing his face to show some concentration to let Barney know he

was interested, " can I invite one of my friends from the case?" Barney stiffened from the mention of the case, and Will quickly spoke up to ease his nerves,

" I met her from the case but we're not going to talk about it Barnes, she's genuinely a friend. Beverly." Barney visually relaxes and Will starts to feel bad for missing so many days now that he sees how stressed Barney has been due to the murders. Guilt starts to eat away at him and he wonders if it should just be him and Barney tonight,

"Yeah," Barney begins, "That's cool, just let her know where Frank's is at and we'll meet her after work? I think I had the same shift as you today, if you came in at 8:00, I couldn't tell cuz I was already out near the banks to close off some trails."

Will nods to confirm the plan and they continue to eat their very non-traditional Chinese food, picking away till they are left with empty Styrofoam boxes that end up in the very overfilled trash can that lies in Barney's corner.

"How have you been? With all this mumbo-jumbo," Barney asks with his hands emphasizing the last part. The question startles Will, for as previously stated, he really wasn't expecting to get into any deeper conversations at the moment past the mention of his birthday,

"How have I been? Pleasant, as pleasant as one can be during this. Sometimes I wish all I had to deal with was novice hunters and angry campers whose spot got taken. Rather explain website reservation to an old-ass than this."

"God I know right? wonder why they can't just figure out you're supposed to click 'Reserve' to actually make the spot… reserved." they both shrug, rolling eyes and giggling once again.

" Truthfully I don't really know, Jack hasn't been communicating with me as much, just asking me if I've seen anything or if I could explain what I already told them. I'm not really too involved… I feel like they're just using me for my mind." Barney was well aware of Will's empathy disorder, so he hums in agreement, " but it's… it feels right. I'm doing the right thing, but every second he's out there I feel like I'm failing to keep someone safe."

" I mean, what can I expect from you? I doubt you're just going to walk into the guy." Will nods and picks at his fingernails, "Is this safe what they're doing to you? Involving you, I mean?" Barney asks with genuine concern. Will's stomach turns,

" Yeah they offered me weekly therapy to, you know, help ease my mind with this,'"

"Oh, they did that for me… something similar just to process seeing death but I already told him I had my own health plan, you know my own stuff…" "Stuff" was said with intention that Will couldn't place,

" Yeah… but me and the guy don't really do therapy… it's more about making conversation than really dealing with what I'm seeing." Barney nods and Will notices his slight skepticism, " I asked for that." Will looks out the fogged window behind the darker man, " I don't like when people pry into my mind– I'm sure you remember,"

“ So what are you guys talking about?” The branches are still on the birch that lines the lot, something moves in the snow.

“ more about what the killer thinks and how… I feel being him when I need to be,”

“Still all about the case though,” Will tightens his lips as he prepares to admit the following information,

“ well…Hann– Lecter, has become more of a friend as of recently?” Will doesn't want to know if ‘friends’ hold each other close as they dance, “-he's cooked for me and I–we've gone fishing once.”

“Oh,” Barney let's Will wallow in the silence, “So, not a professional relationship at all? Not by contract?”

“ Ah, no. Never written up a contract besides that I'm working with the FBI– and he sometimes… I guess handles some medical things. By technicality no.” Rambles Will.

“Medical things?”

“I asked about some symptoms I've been having, he says it's stress.”

“Symptoms?” Barney uses his professional voice, smooth and candid, Will fidgets in his seat and his pants make a scratching noise against the cushion.

“I’m a grown man Barney, I think you can save the dad voice for someone else,” Barney only offers another raised eyebrow in return.

The Stag listens in, the killer behind his eyes lurches forward, but Will doesn't move. He's caught in a crossfire, and he thinks that perhaps this time the stag's eye will display the answer for everything.“Just… nightmares…” Barney hums, brown eyes looking to the side with tentativeness, Will assumes he too has been cursed with unpleasant dreams. He wonders if they're the same caliber of taboo.

Probably not.

“ So they just gave you a buddy?” Barney asks, the tone of the sentence being less humorous than Will would expect. Will's stomach genuinely drops at the thought of a manufactured friend.

“ I wouldn't say that either, our friendship blossomed from a mutual understanding.”

“ Uh-Huh?”

“We get each other, we know where we're at with each other. We have a deeper bond.” Will hopes they have a deeper bond, saying it doesn't necessarily make it the truth. Barney’s face reads a blend of confusion and concern,

“You sound crazy, you know that right?” Will chuckles, not moving a muscle,

“It’s been a long winter,”

With slight hesitation, Barney jokes, “Is that who you've been thinking about then?” Will snaps to face the other man,

“I’m sorry?’” he drawls, allowing a fake condescending tone to slip out, in reality he’s more scared. His fringe tickles his eyes, getting caught in long lashes.

“ I mean I don't see you often but I've seen your little puppy dog eyes, I get it man you know… you guys are like… I mean if you guys are… I aint really care Graham-cracker-”

“ Are you implying— no no Barnes,” Will's face is heating up and he prays that Barney does not notice, “ we just talk, sometimes we talk about my childhood…”

“Sounds like therapy–”

“No,” Will apologizes to Barney for cutting him off in the same breath, “We met before. When I was eighteen.” This quirks up Braneys eyebrow, and Will feels like a child being scolded by his parents, “In Louisiana. It was unexpected to see his face again.” Will keeps watching out the window, trying not to let his surroundings morph into memories. The room begins to heat up, and Will can feel that same old sweat break out.

“...You look—Shit—” and just as Barney starts, his radio begins to signal him in for a bear sighting near one the more northern campsites, he looks toward Will and offers a quaint smile, “Sorry man, I gotta go… I’ll see you tonight though.

“Yes, I'll be there, nine right?”

“Yeah nine.” Barney calls, Will doesn't take his eyes off the window.

The stag stares in.

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 26th 2013

Will spends far too long debating to go clean shaven, before purring down the razor and realizing he's far too shaky to put a razor near any sensitive areas. In fact he even feels ill. Besides, it's fairly neat, and at that stage that change isn't notable unless you show a before picture. He scratches at his face watching how each drag of the nail leaves the skin red.

He begins to sweat profusely, scoffing at the fact he had just showered, and starts to scratch at his cheek harder, leaving wed wilts that drag down into the neat comb of a beard. Something claws at his innards, he can hear the moon, and he chases her song.

What he remembers grabbing his nicer winter coat and salmon button up before he wakes up to the navy sky and snow cushioning his head. The breeze carries white now.

Frank's Bar & Grill, Virginia November 26th 2013, 8:55

When Will makes it to Frank's he's mentally preparing answers to the possible question of "what happened to you?". What he did not consider is Beverly's crass nature:

"Woah someone got lucky! Just look at that bedhead!" She pulls him into a warm hug and Will feels his muscles relax as he breathes in her honeysuckle perfume, "Happy Birthday Will!" They share a smile or two as Barney appears.

"Wow you don't look a day over fifty Graham," Barney slaps Will's back causing Will to choke on some spit while he mutters "thank you, 'Barney,'" he greets Beverly. They shake hands.

The hostess takes them to the back of the restaurant, where it smells heavy of beer. She places three menus and takes their drink order, water for Will, Mojito for Beverly, and Pina Colada for Barney. Beverly stares down Barney after he finishes speaking,

"Can I help you bastards? Can a man not have but one joy?"

They settle into the booth, shuffling on the red leather as warm light coats them, drawing them into conversation.

"So Will, how old are you now?" Beverly asks while she plays with the fringing menu, her eyes do not look up from scanning the 'Hot Plates' section, just below 'Appetizers'

"Thirty eight," he grumbles, ignoring the whistles Bev and Barney give, he looks down at his knuckles, bloody from god knows what,

"I'm surprised you don't have as much of a beer gut, given your diet," Beverly amuses and Barney snorts, Will once again sneers but allows a smile to slip out, a crack of sharp white teeth "Guess it is all the manual labor you do, huh…Imagine if you took up Jack,s offer of being a teacher? Your knees would go bad so fast, just ask Price." She hollers, even if it was a joke for herself,

"He actually wanted to be an FBI agent," Barney interjects, aloofness in his tone, "Too bad he ended up with me,"

“Is that why you're never in the office? Wasn't aware of this… disdain, Barnes,” Will plays, the bald man laughs, hearty and warm, “But yeah I did. But those dreams are long gone now…”

He wonders if eighteen year old him knew what he knew now, if he would change his decision. What if he left for quantico? Would he be happier? He remembers the emptiness in his father’s eyes during his last months alive, cold blue like his own. He remembers that last week with him, he had smiled at Will, seemingly remembering who he was for a second.

No, he probably wouldn't change his mind.

“I mean you’re kinda close, Jack has been ‘Using your mind’, wait sorry, ‘Exploiting your mind’ As Dr. Bloom puts it,” that name leaves a bitter film in his mouth. Barney, seemingly interested despite not knowing much of who they’re are talking about, looks in to Will for his response,

Aware they’re hoping for a denial to these claims, the pit in Will’s stomach makes him ask a separate question entirely, “What do you know about Dr. Bloom?” Barney whips his head to Beverly, but the waitress interrupts them.

Now with their drinks delivered and appetizers ordered, they all sip and wait patiently for Beverly to clear her throat, “What exactly do you wanna know?” Will hears the sickly sweet connotation in her voice, signaling to him she already knows what he wants to know. Beverly is reading him to filth but he wants to be stubborn.

Will will not let conceit a win, “Oh anything, she came by the other day begging me to stop working on the case,” A mojito his slammed into the table,

“She did not!” Beverly shouts.

“Oh!” Barney gasps, they both turn to face him, “Ahem?” They all laugh and face Will once again.

Both jealousy and pure giddiness from the possible revelation of new information swarms his mind, “Yes, but tell me what you know first,” Beverly nods, another audible gulp is heard,

“As a person? She’s a very lovely woman, she’s always polite and does her job well,” Will seethes, but attempts to keep it hidden– by the smug look on Beverly's face he can confirm he has failed, “...In pertaining to Dr. Lecter… Zeller and I think she had a thing for him…” she drawls.

“A thing?” Barney asks while Will bites his tongue, scratching at his beard and dropping his elbows lower,

“Oh yes… but I can’t confirm nor deny these statements…”

“I did see them interact.” Will admits, allowing the group to grow more garrulous.

“Well c’mon FBI boy, do your thing. What was it, empathy disorder?” Barney asks no one in particular while he uses his straw to push down more of his pina colada, his lips pursing as

his attempts show to be futile. Will watches the red maraschino cherry swirl at the bottom, staining the drink red.

Will rolls his eyes, “Well, without using my ‘powers’” Powers is said with such disdain while he glares at Barney, Beverly can assume this is a running joke between the two, “He brews her homemade beer. Because she ‘Doesn’t like wine,’” Will finally sips his water.

“What a bitch,” Barney mocks, making his tone as feminine as possible.

“I mean can we blame her? Have you seen this man?” Beverly gawks,

“Not up close…” Barney admits.

“Oh Will has been VERY close before…” Beverly teases, elbowing Will as his face flushes. This was true, as he remembers the dance they shared. Intimate in nature, each move carefully reflecting the last. He lets his mind wander to his past, their time fishing together, where the sun shined and gave Will a beautiful tab. Where Hannibal looked warm against the warm greens of Will’s home. He wonders if he would go back. Perhaps only with Hannibal.

Perhaps home isn't where the redfish swim, or where the reeds stagger over you, where the lightning bugs dance and jazz players play. Maybe home is where he can hear Hannibal’s voice drawing closer, maybe that is where he will finally feel complete.

“Graham-cracker, you gonna’ eat your food or are you gonna sit there with your mouth open catching flies,” Barney sneers, still humorous,

“My mouth was NOT open” Will retorts as he rubs his jaw. The three begin laughing once again, and Will almost forgets about the case, or the stag.

A shame he stands in the snow, watching as Will's fever persists.

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 26th 2013

Will arrives home around 11:30 p.m. They had finished their evening by enjoying a warm cherry jubilee, while very loudly singing. He had watched Beverly take a cab home, while he and Barney waited alongside her patiently. They both seemed to get along fairly easily despite not knowing each other, and their only connection being Will. Beverly said next time they hang she’ll bring her girlfriend if and only if Barney brings his wife. They had looked at Will expectantly, and he muttered “I’ll see.”

He exhales deeply, allowing the winter air to burn his lungs. His Chevy is parked and locked (manually) and his footprints leave a trail from her to the porch. The wind nips his nose, and falling snow blurs his vision. He can almost hear the news anchors in a few months,

Were expecting very white winter-

Oh a winter wonderland-

–We should be expecting five feet of snow-

All he hears is different hunting rules and a whole lot of tickets for illegal hunting. He rubs his temples with calloused fingers simultaneously groaning to himself how abundant illegal hunting is as of the late. He looks down, fiddling with his keychain to find his house key when his foot stubs against something light, for it bounced with such a delicate touch.

His blue eyes trace what appears to be a small present, a dark plum colored box with gold embellishments. Two swans face each other under an intricate bow, their eyes forever soaking in the other. He reaches down with a groan, forgoing his original plans of unlocking the door because it's cold and he's tired.

Instead his heart races as he traces along the seams, pumping faster and faster before finding a cardstock tag that is attached to the bow. Flipping the jet black tag, two words shine under his porch light with such poshness.

For Will

The handwriting is not printed… and it rings in Will's mind as so familiar. He flutters his eyelashes close, reminiscing on that beautiful painting he received that summer day, and how tracing his fingers on Hannibal's name felt no different than it does today. He can see the spanish moss growing over wisteria. He sees the Magnolia, Lousianna's treasure. Their state flower, and the same flower that was found below the stag–

Will's jaw clenches.

Surely it is but a coincidence? Magnolia is used in many parts of literature– Will does not open the present, instead shoving it to his side and finally unlocking the door. He makes sure

to creep inside, lest he wakes Buster from what sounds to be a very satisfying slumber. He places the gift on his counter alongside his keys, staring at the package, heart thumping in his chest.

He's calling for you… answer back. You know how. Consume him before he gets a chance to run.

Will stares at the package, the skin on his neck raising. Somewhere in the distance a low rumbling plays, as if someone boosted the bass on a speaker to its max. It rumbles deep in his chest and bleeds into his ears. His heartbeat.

He hopes. Deep inside, knowing it's wrong, he hopes.

He keeps hoping as his fidgeting digits rip open the package, embellishments going astray as a single paper is revealed. Its high quality, strong and even-toned as Will holds it up to the yellow kitsch light. Embedded on the page, is a scene of a Man with a pack of dogs, each of their faces illuminated by the moonlight. How Hannibal managed to depict such mediums of light through simple charcoal is lost on Will. Will gulps, noticing that his throat is dry and the low rumbling has not stopped. His face is on fire, searing under his skin while he traces his own face, delicate yet strong.

Below himself, in front of the pack which– to be fair–is a VERY accurate depiction of Will's own dogs–

–Is a wolf. A wolf whose face is as gentle and strong as Will's. Whose eyes bore the same color as Will's. In fact, the only things in this painting are their eyes, and the moon's outline. The same pale blue color, amiable and calming. Will stares for what appears to be hours, seemingly in a trance as his eyes dance across the page, carefully taking in each deliberate pencil scratch. Each pattern, each line weight causes the low rumble in Will's ears to quicken. Its tempo relentless, his skin fire.

He remembered the first painting he was given, how he worshiped at its shrine. He let himself ache, ache so long for the one man who made him feel something indescribable.

He remembered his eyes, sienna red and empty. A vast void where he could only see himself staring back.

He remembers his smell, his touch.

His mind. Somehow Will feels as though he's already been in it. Far deeper than he ever meant to be.

He shudders, allowing the ache to travel through body and settling low in his stomach– before acting too rash, he whips his phone out and texts this very man a single text.

Thank you.

As he brushes his teeth, leaning low into the basin of the sink to spit out the foaming toothpaste past his fangs, a small buzz alerts his senses. Gently sliding his thumb across the home button of the phone, never pressing hard enough to exit the messages app, he reads–

Hannibal: *The gift hopefully was a bestowal of understanding. Was your day one of enjoyment?*

Will didn’t need a gift to know they understood each other, but it did set his heart ablaze and dizzied his mind.

Will: *It was good, Beverly and Barney took me out for drinks.*

Hannibal: *Time with friends is always appreciated*

Will: *Have you spent time with your friends, Dr. Lecter?*

Hannibal: *Formalities again, Will? I had assumed we were friends as well. However, In a way yes. I spoke to Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier.*

Will smiles at the first half, but once again the sour plant of jealousy sprouts from his stomach once more. He leans forward on the basin of the sink, looking once into his eyes, before biting his lip and typing.

Will: *Who is that?*

Hannibal: *My psychiatrist.*

Will's ears perk up,

Will: *psychiatrist? Wasn't aware you were also in the market for a shrink.*

Hannibal: *The mind is a delicate thing, it's good to ensure it is taken care of.*

Hannibal: *On that matter, how are you feeling?*

Will ignores the latter message,

Will: *is she just your psychiatrist?*

If only Will could see Hannibal's smile, small and mischievous.

Hannibal: *No, she is also a friend. Does that bother you?*

Will: *Not very professional is that?*

Hannibal *: I suppose some could argue the same about us,*

Will gets up because his elbows have started to ache. He tries not to let the jealousy nip too hard as he heads down to settle into bed. IS it the same?

Will: *is it the same?*

Hannibal: *No, vastly different.*

Will's stomach grows with unease. How is it different? Could they be romantic? Before Will can type a response–

Hannibal: *Our relations are far more intimate.*

A low heat settles in Will's gut, the head of blush warms his ears. Intimate. The word tastes sweet on his tongue. He remembers this feeling, when he worshiped the painting, when he heard his voice…

When he killed the stag.

With his fangs revealed, flesh molding to flesh. The taste of blood.

Will feels dizzy.

Will: *Intimate?*

Hannibal: *What do you think, Will.*

Will shudders, resisting the urge to palm the warmth between his thighs. His legs, uncomfortably folded on the couch/bed, ache. He focuses on that pain. He focuses on Winston’s snoring, slow and rhythmic.

Will: *I'd rather ask you that. What do you feel, Hannibal.*

Hannibal: *Burning.*

Will can hear the Lithuanian accent through that message, it makes his dick throb. He ignores it. It's almost one o’clock .

Will: *We should go to bed, it's late. You have a job in the morning.*

Hannibal: *As do you. Does it burn, Will?*

Will's throat tightens, the sudden blood rush blurring his vision and he suppresses a groan. Does Hannibal know this is how he makes Will feel? Is this one sided? He should stop-

Will: *It aches.*

Hannibal: *Would you like to call?*

And just like that, Will freezes. The warmth goe, replaced with the sudden coldness of shock. Call? I hear the Lithuanian accent, the warmth resumes. But he can't, he looks at the clock– 1:04 am– he can't. It's late– early? It's early and he can't ruin it again. He can't leave again.

Will: *it's late, I don't want to be the reason you're late in the morning.*

Hannibal: *I have adequate stamina, Will. I can stay up.*

Will nearly whimpers.

Will: *Maybe in the morning, when my head is less muddy.*

Muddy is a great replacement for on fire.

Hannibal: *Very well. Then perhaps we may share a toast of our own sometime as celebration for your birthday? It's what friends do, supposedly.,*

Will: *Was the painting not enough?*

Will winces at how cold that came off as, and lets worry rumble deep in him.

Hannibal: *Does it still ache?*

Inhaling deep through his nose,

Will: *Yes*

Hannibal: *Then we shall toast. Have a goodnight, Will. I will be up a bit later tonight if you ever need me.*

Will wonders why, but doesnt ask.

Will: *Goodnight, Hannibal.*

Wolf Trap, Virginia November 27th 2013 2:45 am

The marsh is warmer than usual, the muddy water that laps at Will's knees smells like the earth. Pure and warm. The sun shines in his eyes, leaving his vision with a black vignette where his eyelids squint. But he marches forward, chasing. The leaves that had made their home next to the grass that sprout from the water part as Will moves, engulfing him in a cuticle of magnolia petals. A voice rings out in the sky, a woman's voice. Calling him to dinner. It's from behind him, so he knows that's not what he's looking for.

A bird cares, and the sound of the marsh hitting the shore sings to him. He follows the splashes, where something sticking out of the marsh can be seen through his lashes.

It stares, forever searching. It beckons him forward.

He obliges.

He moves until the antlers come into view, branching out with Spanish moss drawing over them. It engulfs Will, caressing his skin and mind as his hands reach for its snout. It’s brown eyes— almost a red— look into his eyes. A deep void. Its eyelashes flutter close, and it leans forward, ripples emerging from where it disturbed the water tension. Will allows it to press its head to his dark fur meeting curls.

They stay like that for a while, the sun beating down relentlessly on them as Will prepares for what’s to

come.

“Please,” Will whispers, leaning closer and closer till his face rubs against the rough fur of its neck. It sighs, and Will slowly traces his fingers from the longer underside of his neck, under his wet chin— where the fur ends and the snout huffs steam— to the soft of its forehead and the textured base of antlers.

The moss swings in the wind, the end of the antler is traced in circles by Will's pointer… he pushes it.

Sharp horn meets soft skin, and blood flows out, following the curves of the antlers till it stains the fur just

above the stag's eye. Will pressed further into it, till their heartbeats can be felt by one another.

“Please…” he doesn’t know what he’s begging for.

But he does.

“This isn't me.”

Is it?

“This isn't my mind!” The cries echo in the everglades. A heron flies by, Will does not see. He chooses to focus on the stag.

The stag sighs, leaning its neck against Will's face, the coarse fur covering the jugular of the beast brushes Will's lips. He swallows.

The stag gave itself to him.

Like a wolf, Will mauls. Fangs first, deep into the flesh, blood filling his mouth. The water, now tainted with the blood that swirls in patterns around them, becomes a homogenous mixture of brown and murk. The Stag makes no noise. Will only whimpers, blood rushing with adrenaline. He cries as the antlers meet his ribs and tear at his own fur (skin?).

Just as before, in an endless cycle, they consume on another. Different beings reflecting on one another, running in circles around the same fate.

The antlers that pierce his lungs are replaced with warm, strong hands. The blood of the stag disappears from Will's mouth. The brunette reaches out in the red to hold onto strong shoulders and lets the warm air of a breath huffing against his ear overtake his sensations. He can't feel his limbs, but they're entangled and pressed against someone. The same someone whose hands are inside his ribcage twisting around arteries and squeezing his heart.

“Are you him?”

The sienna eyes bore into his skin. He knows this face, he does. He just has to remember... Will, with much energy, reaches out to touch the ash colored fringe that softly frames the eyes.

“Am I who, Will?”

He knows that voice. Will coughs up blood, salty and metallic.

“You know… you–you always do,” A soft sigh. Will’s skin is on fire. A hand leaves his body cavity and smears blood on his stomach and thighs as it trails closer to where the most blood is located…

“Are you inquiring? Or trying to blur the lines between reality and fiction?”

Will shudders, feeling cold.

“Where is your mind, Will?” The voice withdraws his other hand, pressing it against Will's mouth, prying his teeth open and pushing each bloody digit in.

Will says something, too muffled to understand. The voice presses a soft kiss to his sweaty temple, where curls lay stuck against eyebrows.

“Give in, Will,” A hand curls around Will, eliciting a muffled cry from the brunette, electricity in his veins, “Consume me.”

Will shakes his head– tries to shake his head– He can't. That's not him. The voice knows. It moves closer to his left ear, warm and gentle,

“Please, Will…” A finger rubs along his teeth, amplifying the point, staccato and sneering, “give in to me–”

Will bites. He bites harder and harder, gnawing to bone till the voice’s breath is labored and raw. Until the hand that was just loosely wrapped around him is stroking ever so softly. Until his heart beats faster and faster as the taste of blood fills his senses. It's sweet.

It's sweet.

Will’s eyes fly open, allowing the beige ceiling of reality to shatter the dream world. His breath, just as ragged as the voice in his dreams, is choked and strained. A bead of sweat drips from his forehead to his scruff, only to be mixed into his face as Will rubs it. The moon is out, not quite full, so the blue glow is less defined. It makes the room appear muddy, and makes Will less calm. He hands trails down to his briefs, where they're stuck to his skin– soaked in sweat– and lets his fingers divet in ever so lightly to his erection.

In normal situations, Will would jerk off and roll over to sleep. His fingers feel around his pubes, warm and sticky but trimmed ever so slightly. His jaw clenches, eyes shutter closed as the throb in his head is just milliseconds off from the one right above his right hand. His left reaches back behind his pillow for his phone. Almost dropping it, he manages to turn it on– getting blinded by the phone screen– and goes to contacts.

Hannibal picks up on the third ring. His voice echoes like a gunshot in the room.

“Will? What is the matter?” the doctor's voice is raspy– not quite from sleep for it it's neither delirious nor drowsy– but from an adequate amount of in-use. It tempts Will into shifting his right hand down ever so slightly as he sits more upright on the couch, a pillow holding him, but his body is almost flat. His right leg is folded up, while his left is laid out, giving anyone

in the room an obscene view of his erection– which is straining against his briefs and making his voice far worse than Hannibal's.

He takes a moment to catch his breath, but it still comes out almost whining, "Bad dream, doctor."

Static is heard for a second, "Is it the Stag?"

Will clicks his tongue, looking at the moonlight. He knows. He always does. His right hand's fingers scratch just above the base of his cock. This is wrong.

"Yes–" He chokes out, he can't catch his breath. But the fear of alerting Hannibal to his current situations forces him to try, "Yes. I ate him. I ate him-"

"You ate the Stag?" Hannibal sounds alert now, but his accent is heavier. Will keens, his lips curling back as his fever runs strong.

"I ate him– and I ate–" Who was it that he ate? "It felt right Hannibal. It felt right to bite through his fingers."

"Deer do not have fingers, Will," Will takes a second and breathing slows, far above normal but slow enough to sound coherent. Enough to think about anything else than getting air. He can hear Hannibal's breathing, slow and collected. Thoughtful. "Why did you call, Will?"

He lets himself filter a breath through his nose, deep and filling up his ribs where the hands once felt to be. "I need- I needed to process. I– needed you." Will doesnt know why he's said that, his vision is blurry and the phone is slipping from his left hand because of his sweaty palms.

Hannibal's breathing becomes subtly more sporadic, "What did you need from me, Will?" So many questions.

"It's not what I needed from you–" Will clears his throat, still processing what time it is and who is he speaking with, "I needed to consume you."

Static, "How?" Was that a rustle?

Will inhales sharply, "With my teeth." There's more rustling on the other end, and suddenly Will's head is so warm he doesn't quite care what happens next, "What are you doing Hannibal?"

A laugh, low and warm, "I was just settling into bed, I have a long day tomorrow. I have quite a row of patients to see–" The patients. Will's appointment is tomorrow, that thought washes over him like cold water, almost bringing him to the reality he faces–

"What are you doing?"

The question stays static in the air. Silence on both ends of the line. Will ignites. His neck muscles tighten and he feels his heart beat catching up again, "I just woke up…" He cringes at the whiny-ness of his voice.

However, Hannibal appears to care less (possibly more?) “What did you feel when you consumed me? whether it be figuratively through the stag… or..”

Hannibal trails off, an oddity for Will. “I felt-” He pondered at the older man's observation– consuming the stag… “I felt full, I felt warm, I felt whole I felt–” His cheeks burn, “I felt good,”

“Do you gain sexual satisfaction from these dreams, Will?” The question–almost left field– sends humiliation and need in shock waves through Will's body. He gives in and uses his hand–warm at the palms but cold at his fingers– to wrap slowly around the thickening base of his dick. He feels the vein that runs along it throb.

“Will?” Hannibal repeats, Will wonders how his voice remains so smooth asking question to that manner– and if he can hear Wills breathing,

“Yes, I… I get hard. I cum to the thought of killing I’m-” Will chokes out, shame and lust enveloping him. He needs Hannibal. He needs Hannibal to touch him.

“Touch you how, Will?” Hannibal's voice has become hoarse. Will squints his eyes, wincing at the realization he's spoken out loud– yet his mouth won't stop.

“I- " he strokes himself once, opening one eye to look down at where his hands move conspicuously under the gray briefs. You can see where his knuckles meet fabric, and the outline of his head. He pulls them down, grunting into the microphone. Hannibal takes a sharp breath that's lost in the rustling of the fabrics.

“Are you touching yourself, Will?”

“Why do you ask so man-”

“Will.” Will squeezes his base, looking at the moon through heavy lidded eyes.

“Yes.” This is wrong. He should be shameful, did Hannibal even con-

“Go slow,” Hannibal commands. Thick and heavy. Will's eyes widen briefly, his tongue suction to the roof of his mouth. He continues his lazy strokes, the phone scratching against his beard.

“I am,” He peers over, pressing the phone deeper into his cheek. His hands move with precision, linger a second longer at the tip where precum begins to collect. Pink against the pale of his hand– calculated– like the hands in his dreams. As Hannibal told him to.

“Slowly, take a deep breath, and use firm pressure as you go up,”

“Is this how you would do it?”

“To myself, usually.” Hannibal masturbates. Will wonders what to do. Will also lets that image work him up even more. He contemplates taking off his white T-shirt as well, but lets it be.

Hannibal is breathing deeply, Will wonders if he's touching himself. He remembers how it felt to press against Hannibal, to dance with him. Who had strong arms pinning him against a counter as they cooked. How good he smelt, like home. Like that summer day. How he wanted to–

“How would you do it to me?” Will risks. More static is heard before Hannibal responds,

“Feral. I would do it however you needed me to do it. But I would do it with much passion and-”

“Intimacy,” Will imagines Hannibal nodding, layed poised and perfect in his bed.

“I want to touch you,” Will admits, taking one nervous gulp, “I want to be there, I want to feel your hands,”

“Would you like me to touch myself?” Will swallows,

“Please,” this time he knows what he's begging for. Hannibal was right about their intimacy, now they both lay touching themselves to the others noises. Hannibal is much quieter, Will matches his rhythm with that of Hannibal's breathing, its slowly speeding up,

“You smell like honey,” Will squeezes himself for a second, before slowly continuing,

“You smelled me?”

“Hard to resist,” Will scoots up, letting his ring finger lightly trace the underside of his cock. Arousal settles low in his stomach, “When I pressed you against my counter, you smelled of honey.”

“Is this a good thing?” Will quirks en eyebrow, still looking at the moon.

A low groan plays through Will's phone, “I desire to taste it Will. To taste you,”

Now it's Will's turn to groan, barely able to process what Hannibal is saying. The feeling of want overrides any shame at this point in Will's mind.

“Hannibal-” Will groans, “Please-” His breath is labored, listening to Hannibal's low moans. A sound so wanton from someone so prestigious feels taboo, it burns through Will, where the precum leaks into his palm. He needs more. He settles up and can be heard spitting into his hand, where he proceeds to jerk himself off faster than Hannibal had asked.

“Will-”

“I spat in my hand, hence t-the noise-”

“Would you prefer if I was messy about it?” Will imagines Hannibal, lips shiny with saliva as he takes down Will. Will indulges himself in these images, frying his wires with lust.

Will groans, “Yes- Actually I don't care what you do as long as-” he pauses, noticing a soft squelching noise on the other end. Slow. lewd. Hannibal. Hannibal touches himself to Will,

“As long as it's you,” he completes.

He imagines what Hannibal must look like now, his sharp features contorted into a twist of pleasure and pain. Or would his face be calm, treating it merely as an executive function to get through with. Would his mouth be opened, as he works himself up? He can imagine a blush painted across his cheekbones.

The moon beckons him forth, the blue blurry as his eyes fill with tears,

“Will…”

“I ache for you, Hannibal,” He aches to consume, “I need to consume you, I need to tear you apart piece by piece,” He spits. His fever runs wild, the moon is bright.

“Let me honor you, Will.” Hannibal begs, the once posh voice now desperate and needy, Will quivers, Imagining Hannibal taking him apart piece by piece just as he would. Two apex predators fighting for control. He imagines them clawing at each others backs-

“I want to bite you Hannibal, mark you. Claim you- make you mine-” Will licks his lip, salty from sweat. The pleasures became overwhelming, “Let me, Hannibal, please…”

“Do you like it Will? Knowing I’m yours? Knowing no one can have me but-”

“Yes, Yes!” Will clenches his jaw, feeling himself getting closer. Some sounds of pleasure escape Hannibal's lips, and the lewd sound of himself masturbating spins the wheels in Will's brain, “I want to mark you with everything, my blood, my cum-”

“Will.” Cuts through the air, demanding, almost as if it's a warning.

“Hannibal,” Will drawls out, his dick throbbing in his hand. It's painfully hard, so close yet so far from cumming. His mind is hazy. “Do you want me to… I- I can lick t-the blood off’a ya..” Will’s drawn out speech resembles that of his southern one, slow and deep…

Hannibal whimpers, not a moan, not a groan, a higher pitched choke of air, a whine.

“Hannibal, m’close I-” The phone is slipping, Will catches it with his shoulder.

“I want to hear you Will,” Will’s fingers move faster, he pictures Hannibal's skilled hands, pleasuring him and biting down on his neck.

“Hannibal,” he croaks, blinding white light overcomes his vision, eyes twisted shut.

“Will. Will-” His voice, the same voice that's been in his head for so many years, brings him to the cusps of orgasm.

Warmth radiates through Will, as if he's glowing. Pure bliss as waves of pleasure go through him. He can't hear the noises he's making, only ringing in his ears as he orgasms. He thinks

he’s saying Hannibal, drool is running down his face and thick ropes of cum spill all over his hands and thighs. It’s a lot, sticky and messy and will stare down as it drips from his hand.

“Hannibal?” Hannibal does not answer, instead he hears a deep sigh and a shuddering inhale. His mouth slightly ajar, bottom teeth showing, he listens to Hannibal groan his name as he too orgasms. Will attempt to say something, but nothing can come out. His throat feels tight so he swallows the excess saliva in his mouth. He feels like passing out.

“I’m sorry,” he settles for, he can hear movement on the other end, Hannnibal cleaning up unlike Will who has allowed the semen to coagulate and cool all over himself.

“I wish I could see you right now…” Comes a breathless voice comes from the phone. As for Will, he looks wretched. Cum all over himself and a ruby red adjourning his cheeks. His hair is sticking up at odd angles, and he looks even more feverish.

“Nng…” he smartly replies. His eyelids feel too heavy to keep open.

Hannibal says something, he can't make out. The moonlight is fading, and so is his voice. He closes his eyes, body heavy and breathing regulated.

He had no other dreams that night.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry this took so long, life has been cruel to me lowk.

Sunlight. Bright and warm. Shining through Will's porch windows as the dogs all snore around their master. Will emerges from his cocoon of blankets with hair awry and eyes swollen. He yawns slowly, lifting up the blankets, but only to be stopped by the most uncomfortable feeling surrounding his groin. He takes a second, slumped where he slept, to look down to see dried cum in his underwear. He tugs his eyebrows closer in confusion, looking around the room as if the answer was hidden in some nook and cranny.

He settles down, realizing his phone was never charged and groans as he leaves in search of a charger. He's sifting through the junk drawer that has random letters and bills lying about. It's actually too full, and takes some tugging to open.

With the charger acquired he heads downstairs and decides to just plug it in there as he makes his coffee. As he brews his Folgers instant coffee, the phone lays to the side, untouched.

Dead phone? Dried cum? What the hell happened? Winston whines as Will paces barefoot around the kitchen, goosebumps forming from the morning chill, waiting for his coffee to finish brewing. The small areas of tile are extra cold and Will regrets not buying slippers when he saw them at a bargain bin. He tries not to think about his crusted pubes (gross) and focuses on what exactly happened. To be fair, half of his days are merely blurs and he's starting to seriously reconsider this whole stress thing.

He pours his coffee, creamer in first, while the other canines begin to slowly emerge from their own dreamland. He makes his way to the silverware drawer to gather a spoon and Hannibal's gift catches his eye– then suddenly some vivid images of last night rush back to him. It makes him breathless and the corners of his vision blur like a vignette. His neck hairs stand up. Fear? Embarrassment? Confusion?

"What the fuck?" he echoes to the room. Winston– who was previously pawing at a crack in the floor– watches his owner rub his flustered face and sit at the table with arms folded around his head.

Only Will is not flustered from realization of what he and his doctor had done, rather he's trying to piece together exactly what he said and how far things got. While he has some image, it's not clear what did occur. He recalls having a dream of someone touching him, then recalls Hannibal's voice ringing in his ears as the moon glowed blue for him. He remembers orgasming so hard he forgot his name. He can almost hear Hannibal calling his name, the static ring that made his voice sound like a deep mahogany, or the dark pines that lined Will's

road. Made it dirty, made it wrong. Did they talk last night? He remembers their texts but nothing much after. He remembers a headache– reminding him to also pop some Motrin before it gets worse– and the confusion of a fever dream. What happened?

By the time Will showers and changes -trimmed the beard to a nice stubble but yet to be clean-faced due to the cold- he is finally able to look at his phone. By pure curiosity (and fear) he checks his call logs.

Outgoing call: *Hannibal* 2:51 a.m.

It lasted two hours. Two. Hours. Blue eyes widen and he can't catch a breath. His jaw nearly drops- instead he opts for his usual teeth grinding- anxiety brewing in his stomach. He tries to stabilize his hands as they grasp his phone, opening messages and instantly clicking on Hannibal's contact. But what would he say? In a daze, he marches along in his work boots to let the dogs out after their breakfast, and he wonders if texting his psychiatrist " *Hey did we call last night????And did we have phone sex????Yes????No?????help????"* is reasonable behavior for a normal person. No, he deduces, but this is Will Graham, and he is anything but normal…

He does not send the message. Instead, when seeing the day being Wednesday, he is also alerted to the fact he has a meeting with Hannibal this evening. Now he really starts freaking out. Will never outwardly freaked out, instead he usually sighs heavily while rubbing his face or twitching his neck– this is not that time. This time it included headbanging against the steering wheel of his truck and staring into the reflection of his rear view mirror before clicking his tongue and driving off.

As his truck passes through nearby cities and towns on his way to the park, the shivering fear has yet to leave his system. What happened? If something happened, SHOULD he text? Should he wait for their meeting and scope Hannibal's reactions? Then he could just come to his own conclusion on what occurred last night? But that would cause festering anxiety for his day at work and he should really rip the bandaid off-

He chooses to wait.

<u>Shenandoah National Park, Virginia November 27th, 2013</u>

“Aren’t you glad we get reduced hours for Thanksgiving? Aren't they so generous! Goodness, Graham! I can't wait to finally see my wife! What a special day tomorrow will be!” Barney coos sarcastically as they aimlessly stumble around the information kiosk that greets visitors to the park. Though a National Holiday, the Ripper case keeps them working so they can log unusual activity, and work on stuff the case has taken time away from. Tomorrow it's closed, but today they work. They preoccupy themselves with state required log in sheets, and their usual list of visitors to the FBI. In fact, Will is just finishing up his posting of a large, neon orange sign reading “BOBCAT TRAIL AND SURROUNDING CLOSED DUE TO ACTIVE INVESTIGATION WITH FBI *SORRY FOR THE INCONVENIENCE!* ” mounted on the original, yet outdated, “LAKE IS CLOSED” sign that had faded into “LA CLO”. Will's gloved fingers traced the raised lettering, lingering over “FBI” with some tranquility. A former life, a path never taken, the “what if’s” of Will Graham.

“Barney,” Will begins, clearing his throat once till the bald man whips his head around to peer at Will over a steaming cup of joe, “You can leave early tonight, I don't have any plans this evening.” This was a half-truth, for he had the dreaded session.

Barrney gives a sigh of relief, the warmth of it shown in the air.

“Will, you are a good man.” He admits, though Will can't pick up any signs of a humorous tone. This baffles Will, and he can only offer a shy smile to his friend.

That night, Will leaves the park an hour later than he usually does, meaning the sky had turned from a burning red to a midnight blue. The cold bites, causing Will’s skull to throb. His stomach burns, a long deep ache reminding him of his lack of food. The radio mumbles, shifting in between static and song as the pines block his sides. The longest period of static was when he was crossing under a bridge, and in the fuzz he could make out some words.

The man you seek, rests among your mind. You know him, Will. You stare at his face every morning-

Will shuts off the radio with a loud click

Baltimore, Maryland, November 27th, 2013 7:27pm

Will had worked late, stalling more so he didn't have to face Hannibal after the call. The thought of which still caused an ache in his spine. Perhaps it was all a dream and therefore had no effect on their relationship. The call log wouldn't suggest so. Still, a man can dream.

But you wanted that? You liked knowing he craves you, you like how he hunts for you. You need him.

Will shivers. His mind seems to take pleasure in conjuring up all tender moments between the two as he stands outside the psychiatrist's door. Works great for making him more fearful of how Hannibal will react. They danced- they ate together. There's something so intimate about sharing a meal, so intimate about them. He hopes last night didn't ruin it.

The door opens, a startling creak waking Will from his thoughts. In front of him is Hannibal, with crisp hair and a windowpane checkered suit–three piece. His tie bears intricate swirls and patterns – catastrophic patterns, the kinds that only work on him.

Will's curls are not as messy today, delicately combed and he does not wear his glasses. He came straight from the park, so his ranger outfit is worn and his snowy boots may have left tracks on the way in. He clicks his nails together where they rest on the side, forearm brushing against his gun holster; He didn't take it off.

"Will," Hannibal smiles, creasing the corners of his mouth. His eyes track Will's figure bottom to top, "-please, do come in."

"How was your day at work, Will?" Hannibal happily asks, almost ringing as fake in Will's mind, and tad breathless as he sits on his desk and reaches for a pen that sits to the right of him. There's papers astray, some appear to be pencil sketches.

Hannibal seems… delightful. Normally cool and collected, he seems to be looking pleased. Almost excited. It's peculiar.

Will moves to the main area, still observing Lecter, beginning to pace in front of his usual seat. He contemplates sitting, but his legs burn as if they need to move. His phone sits jarringly in his pocket, a reminder of last night's call. His neck is tight.

"It was good, set up some signs," He sounds awkward, his throat feels too narrow and he doesn't know what to say, he's vulnerable "It's closed tomorrow for the holiday, knowing

Jack I'll probably be doing some permits.” Will mutters. Hannibal's auburn eyes glisten.

“Thanksgiving, the preparations of feasts. It always bemused me how that Holiday came to be. Any plans for that?” Hannibal looks sharp yet inviting, It almost calms Will. He thinks about his dogs for a second, gathered round him waiting for a bone.

“No, just eating with the pack.” he laughs, mostly to himself, “What about you Dr. Lecter?” Formalities. Will’s standing, thumbing his gun holster. Protection? Is the ranger fearful? “Any plans?” Will is uneasy, the call won't leave his mind, specifically the vulgar things his mind is creating. A rarity, Hannibal is more energized than Will, a clash of moods.

“Dinner party.” That's the first Will’s heard of it.

“Is Dr. Bloom going to get her homemade beer?” Will asks, a hint of jealousy not filtered through his voice. Will had almost forgotten about her, but the envious stricken memory of her closeness to Hannibal makes him sternly stare at the older man. Unlike Will, this thrills the psychiatrist, a sharp quirk of his lips revealing some of his teeth. He likes when Will shows his desire. A sense of pride can be felt. Will’s need for him as apparent, his want to keep him close, mark him as his. Hannibal wants to see more of that.

“She will be in attendance, if that is what you're asking. I unfortunately planned this months ago.” Before you appeared, is what Hannibal should say but he finds enjoyment in the look of Will's sneer, his unfiltered emotions. Will's face is beautiful when he doesnt mask it in faux stoicism; contrast to Hannibal. Will feels everything, so he has to mask. Hannibal chooses what he feels, no need to mask what isn't there. Two pieces of the same chess board. Hannibal decides to switch topics, Not wanting to prod at Will’s anger any longer.

“I am sure you are very busy with the ongoing investigation…” Hannibal straightens his tie, peering up at Will, observing the way his collar meets his neck, “How is that going?” he inquires. His voice is liquid smooth. Will always loved his voice, it was what settled in the back of his mind for nineteen years. It eases him, familiarity to a past memory.

“It’s going, the feds have no idea when the Ripper will strike again so Jack’s been hounding me with paperwork.” Will finally sat down with a soft thump into his leather seat. Hannibal slyly gets up from his desk, making his way over to sit directly across. Will feels his fingers tingle in nervousness. Does he remember? Was it true?

“Has your mind tormented you as of late, the last we called you seemed… quite dismayed from your nightly quarrels…” Hannibal is direct, but not informative. This leaves the gaps in Will's memory unfilled. Will internally groans at the thought of their last call, half of him hoping he wouldn’t bring it up so there would be no need to face whatever shame it will bring. Of course what he thought happened was real, but that's hard to verify when your memories are like wire headphones left in a pocket for too long.

He looks into Hannibal's eyes, hard to read. He can't tell if Hannibal’s omitting what could've happened as a way to get Will to bring it up first. Again, if it even happened.

“Sometimes,” Will admits, “I… nothing today. Just nerves,” He feels his beard with his fingers, rubbing each coarse hair. He needs to grow it out for winter. Unless Barney invites

him over for Cherry Jubilee one of these days, then maybe he'll shave.

“Nerves, are you nervous about the case?” Hannibal leans back while Will leans forward, elbows resting on his knees, Hannibal looks genuinely concerned, and that means his eyebrows are drawn tight and his eyes squint.

“No, uh- maybe.” Will mumbles, he’s too scared to bring it up, to get the answer. Right now it's a SSchröödinger’s Paradox, open the box and see if they did or did not do it. No one will know till someone speaks.

“What is it that makes you so scared, Will? So you find it beautiful what they do, is that really an issue?” Will gawks, the forwardness amplifying the weirdness of it all.

‘Yes? I’m not some sick freak, who idolizes these-”

“But you never said anything about idolization, you merely acknowledge their beauty.”

“Well…” Will plays with the seams in his work pants, “Beauty is subjective. There could be a lot of light in beauty”

“-but also a lot of darkness in it,” Will eyes Hannibal, no outward reaction from him.

“Yes…” Will suspiciously trails, “but the animals kill, that's darkness. But it's beautiful, because it's a way of loving. humans do it for… something else, not survival. Pleasure-”

“That is not true.” Hannibal hums, admiring Will’s beauty unashamedly.

“Excuse me?” Will is slightly taken aback, nothing The Ripper has done seems anything close to the natural order of mother nature. Though it feels righteous.

“Wolves. They hunt for pleasure sometimes, not killing to consume, merely to pass the time, as one would say. You often… dream of being wolflike.” This is true, since that incident with the fridge he’s felt an adrenaline pumping through his veins and he can’t seem to satiate it. His mind is too muddled to put anything together.

“If I were to kill it would be for… necessity. A hunt.”

Hannibal knows that's a half lie, or he projects it to be. Will is like him, his counterpart. Hannibal finds the joy in it, the pleasure. But deep down it's a need, a carnal need to fill the void that grew when he spat out his sister's bones. Will is the opposite, hunting on a need, but deep down there's a sick pleasure he gets out of it. For cleansing the world of being… Wrong. He is righteous.

“Is that so,” Hannibal makes a small click with his tongue, “But you find beauty in even the pleasurable kills. Since you were young.”

“Only when they are honored. Not humiliated,” Will shakes his head, diving into a tangent, “No, when the killer displays the body as a form of humiliation, that's- I hate that. I hate when I feel their sick, perverted pleasure…” Hannibal nods, Will continues.

“But when they show them off as… art as… honor it’s…it's different. I can- understand in a way. I see what they see. Well, I always see what they see, and feel what they feel- but when it's honored, I feel my true self agreeing.”

Hannibal watches as Will scratches his beard, lazily admiring where the strands of Will's hair glow in the light. When he faces it, he looks just like the man Hannibal became obsessed with all those years ago. He briefly wonders if Will is also reminded of the past when he sees him. He crosses his legs, poised and attentive.

He doesn't know it's his voice that calls Will back into the marsh.

“You like the killings Will, because in your eyes they deserve it. They kill innocent creatures wrongly. Animals, that commit no sin- As you say,”

Will nods, “and it's in an honorful way,” he repeats, more as clarification for himself. Hannibal notes he didn't deny the first part.

“Does this apply to only The Ripper? This feeling of righteousness? Enjoyment?” Will’s face contorts in dismay, “This is a safe space Will, I do not judge. You know that. If anything I admire you,” Will’s eyes widen at that, “is there any other instance you… felt connected like how you are with The Ripper, from your previous cases as a detective?” They never do talk about his past as a homicide detective, in fact Will has buried most of those memories in the barks of the sycamore trees, under the snow. But the stag and fever brings them back, the blood, the thrill, Will purses his lips, genuinely thinking,

“No,” the answer comes fast. It's like years of forgotten memories arise whenever he and Hanniballl speak. Hannibal quirks a thin eyebrow, his face a soft smile “There was once another who I understood in a way. It wasn't a case I worked on though. I only saw his work in detailed photos and writings.”

“Do tell.” Will finally stretches back, legs spread wide, brown work pants stretching over his thighs. Hannibal quickly glances at his crotch before looking back at his face. He too has urges.

There was a time when Will was young, enveloped in feelings for his mysterious friend who came into his world and crashed it. But that wasn't the only catalyst for what Will Graham was to become, or was to resent. He remembers college, where he lost his accent and he exposed himself to intimate crime scenes. Each case he studied passed in a blur, facts regurgitated for each exam, lost as he stood in his dorm staring at his painting. However, there was one who stuck out to him, who made Will swell in twisted admiration.

“He was called the ‘ Il Mostro di Firenze’, I wrote my thesis on him.” Back when autumn leaves fell and Will was not as tormented by his own mind, or he was, but in different ways. In a longing ache for his mother, for Hannibal, for the moon, and sun.

You still feel that ache, it never left, You long for it, the lightning bugs, your fathers embrace, your Hannibal.

“He made death beautiful. Something to be ogled at. Like he appreciated every muscle-tendon- he hoisted them in a sacred place where they could be worshiped.”

Hannibal knows exactly what Will is going to say, he’s read it. It’s the start of this cat and mouse game. He knew Will was his equal when he met him, but it was his words that made Hannibal yearn. Excitement runs deep in Hannibal, but he must stay calm.

“Dr. Lecter,” formalities, a way to build an invisible barrier before asking what he's about to ask, “We called last night, yes?” Will's voice is like gravel, yet unsteady with unease. Hannibal tilts his head slightly in confusion.

Will doesn't remember.

“That is correct,” Hannibal folds his hands over his lap, “you were having a bad dream.” Will's stomach feels queasy, but he has to know.

“Was there more to it?” There's silence, something Will wasn't expecting. Hannibal looks-conflicted.

“You admitted some interesting feelings,” Will held his breath, “it was an invigorating experience.”

“Invigorating?” Hannibal looks down, seemingly pondering. Will has never seen him this… human, not since he sold him a fish in a market during the early morning hours. He looks softer, warmer. It warms the atmosphere into something more delicate. The harshness of the lamp is muted, and the stag behind him looks away.

“You admitted things your normal barriers do not allow- I found them to be interesting. Appealing to my mind.” Hannibal found Will interesting,

“What did I say? I hope I didn't make myself into a new toy for you to prod… ” Will jokes, Hannibal thinks for a second, eyes shifting as he calculates his words. He straightens himself out,

“Never that Will, you are my friend- Companion,” Will smiles, small and dainty but it's there, Hannibal's sharp eyes outline it. Then in an instant, Hannibal drops a bombshell.

“You admitted you gain sexual gratification from the act of hunting in these dreams. Consuming… keeping one with you.” the color on Will's face drains, Will shifts in his seat. Scared.

“Are you sure? Why would I-” Though he knew it was true somewhere deep in his consciousness he still wanted the possibility of it being false. The small flashes of lust and need, the sounds of their breathing. Hannibal attempts to sooth,

“I wouldn't group it as the likes of other, more deplorable people, if that eases your mind. My professional opinion would be that you like the equality of it. You hunt each other, you have an equal. Consuming them is like you said-”

“-preventing them from leaving.”

“Yes. But I would say that is the only reason. You like the hunt, the kill. You like that he is the only one worthy of fighting back.” These words embed himself into Will’s mind.

“Was there more to it, Hannibal?” Will's cheeks are dusted pink, his blue eyes searching for an answer. Who is Hannibal to deny the truth?

“Yes,” Hannibal still sounds confident, but his voice is gentler now, “I talked you through orgasm, and we pleasured ourselves to each other's voice.”

Hannibal allows for a few seconds of silence, the darkness of the room enhancing Will’s silhouette. He watches the ranger, the slight raise of his eyebrows, his lean further into the back of the seat. His hands appear to be clawing his thighs, as if reaching out for something to hold. Hannibal can smell his aftershave, unpleasant, but Will’s. Hannibal is gloating, to have this control over Will. Just his words having such an affect on him.

“You said you dreamt of eating a stag- then a man. I found your carnal need pleasing. Mutual.” Hannibal sits calmly in his seat.

As for Will, a wave of emotion runs through him. Shock. Fear. Joy. Pleasure. It ends off in lust and shame, knowing they were so vulgar with one another. The noises Hannibal made come rushing into his ear. He shudders,

“I-” Hannibal examines his movements, Will is flustered being watched, somewhere deep down he likes it. He wishes he had his glasses, “Are you serious?”

“Do you doubt me?”

“No-” he lies, Will is doubtful, he is frozen in his seat, legs still spread, “I doubt myself- That I just did that.”

“Will, I promise you I was not disturbed, I was pleased to have helped soothe your mind.” Hannibal says matter of factly, as if he's talking to a colleague and not Will who is burning up at each word.

“It was a way to rewrite the unpleasantness of your dreams, and instead focus solely on your urges. What you truly feel. I would say it worked well. Though unorthodox.”

Will finally stands up, legs shaking slightly, his fingers trembling. His stomach in butterflies, “I-” He pauses, an epiphany forming. Hannibal admitted he acted on his own urges. Mustering up some confidence, he looks down at Lecter, “You said you pleasured yourself as well?”

Hannibal stands, following suit, the two men a few feet apart. He begins to slowly trail Will’s own pacing. As if circling each other. There is tension, tight, like a rope has been hoisted

between the two and is threatening to rip them in half.

“I did say I was unorthodox in my practices-” Hannibal says flatly, deflecting.

“But I’m not your patient.” Will counters, “And if I was… this seems like something you wouldn't dare do, Doctor. You’re also a very controlled man,” Like a snap Will is on detective mode. Hannibal feels for him, possibly. It's funny, Will can dissect a crime scene perfectly but not his own love life.

Hannibal watches him, searching for something, “I will say it was a vulnerable moment for me, to give in to my… desires. I wanted you to ache, Will.” Hannibal admits.

There's a shift in the room, everything looming in, focusing on the two predators as they observe one another, predicting each other's next move. It's no longer warm, intimate, or interrogative, instead it's a challenge.

“Do you understand me?” Will bluntly asks, “The need, the yearn, the hunt. Do you feel that way too?” They stand tall, relishing in this moment. Not a battle for dominance, but a dance of equal measures. Ensuring your counterpart is of an equal playing field. Sizing one another up.

Finally, a quick response, “I understand it.”

“But do you feel it?”

“Will. I feel it. I ache for what you yearn for.” Nothing is stated directly, it never is with the two, but it flustered Will regardless. He looks to the side window where it is dark and painfully reminding Will of his long day and inadequate hours of sleep. He walks to it, past the long sofa, where patients can choose to lay, and enclosing himself in the white and red curtains, acknowledging the sounds as Hannibal draws near. It’s just them, Will facing the window and Hannibal right behind him, facing Will.

Hannibal looks hungry.

Will looks ravishing.

Hannibal is fascinated.

The fabric of Will’s work shirt is pressed into his shoulder, he registered Hannibal's hand, strong yet gentle, reaching into his side. His gun holster. Will should step away, protocol. He lets Hannibal cover the end with his digits for his face is pressed into the curls on his nape, where he can feel the warmth of his breath

“Have you killed with this, Will?” he articulates, drawn out, almost a tease.

Will is taking deep breaths, his eyes fluttering close. Hannibal breathes into Will, smelling the thick scent of honey once more. His mouth waters, “Tell me, Will.” he commands.

His left hand is now preening Will’s hair, behind Will’s left ear, forcing Will to make the softest, quietest whimper.

“No.” he admits, “Got close when a mountain lion came at Barney and I when-” He tries not to focus on the warmth of Hannibal's hands as they grab his hip now, “late at uh, night.”

“And you did not, why?”

“It was just an animal. I… couldn't…”

Will bites his tongue, watching as Hannibal gently grabs his right arm with his own, slowly spinning him around to face each other. Hannibal's pepper hair has been rustled from where it rubbed against Will, causing some strands to lay on his forehead.

“Will you accompany me to an opera?” Will blinks.

“Sorry?”

I was hoping for you to accompany me to an opera.” Hannibal repeats, voice unwavering. Will turns to face him, perplexed, and very close.

“I don't know if I even have anything nice enough to wear-” of course that's the first thing he says,

“That does not bother me, I want your mind there. You. I can't promise that the company we will be around will be to your taste. Will you come?”

Will feels his stomach lighten, a pit in his throat. Is it a date? Should he ask?

“Is this a friend thing?” Hannibal softly smiles, eyes not leaving Will.

“It is what you desire.”

Will nods, dumbfounded at the fact he might have just been asked on a date. (what he desires? seriously?) Hannibal eventually lets go of his gentle hold, leaving Will’s elbow with the ghost of an embrace. They smile at each other, and Will is joyous, something missing for quite some time. The ache in his head rests for a little. Beverly is gonna freak.

Hannibal confirms the time, And offers to take Will suit shopping. Will denies, not wanting to be a burden, and feels giddy for December 12th. Hannibal informs him sessions will be on hiatus due to holidays, but they will text regularly. Will is still in shock. Nineteen years he ached, and it could be settling.

On the way out, Hannibal asks him a question.

“Will, when do you think The Ripper will kill again?” Will searches Hannibal's eyes, The answer is right in front of him and he can't see.

“He’ll do it when it's convenient,” he thinks about how The Ripper acts, how each kill is a call out to someone, “not convenient like easier, but convenient as in- when he needs his message heard again, when he needs to, ‘wrangle in’ his person.”

“It will be a confession.”

“Yes, but not of his guilt. Of something else,” Will sighs, rubbing his temple. His head hurts again.

“I guess poor Jack has to play a waiting game.” Hannibal bemuses, holding the door open for them.

“Yeah, I just hope he doesn't strike soon. I don't want my Christmas holiday getting ruined with more paperwork, “ Will jokes. Hannibal smiles,

“That is up to him…”

Baltimore, Maryland, November 28th, 2013

Hannibal had spent the previous night scrolling through forums upon forums of hunters and various hunting blogs. No one caught his eye. He needed someone, a gift for Will. Hannibal had smiled to himself, A Christmas gift if you would.

He eventually noticed a man, John Lewesnky. Frequent park goer of Will’s sanctuary, and an active hunter. He hunts with dogs, something illegal in Will’s state. Hannibal infers Will will be extra delighted at the death of this man, given his own close connection to dogs.

“Bad dogs, bad man.” he had tutted.

“So, Hannibal, how is Will doing?” Alana asks, leaning over Hannibal's counter while he prepares the roast. Alana always did love coming early to the dinner parties, and who is he to deny a friend.

Hannibal cuts the twine that was tied around the roast, “Good, we managed to work through some of his stressors, and allow him to find more peace at night.” Alana frowns.

“Peace at night? Hannibal, does he have nightmares?” Alana interrogates, Hannibal glances up at her shortly, before wiping his hands on a towel, He notices her beer is still untouched, “Anyone in such a high stress environment is bound to have the occasional night terrors. I am sure you would know,”

Alana's frown deepens, “Except we are trained for this. Will is a park ranger- and don’t say he used to be a detective, I’ve gathered that,” her loose brown curls fall over her shoulder. Delicate, pretty, Hannibal admires the structure of them, “but he hasn't been for quite some time. I’m sure the most disturbing thing he’s seen is a bear attack, not a skinned human stretched over a deer.”

“He did see that.”

“Hannibal.”

Hannibal puts the roast in the oven, keeping it warm as he prepares the side carrots, an assortment of purples, whites, and oranges. He opens his mouth to respond before the doorbell rings through the manor. They stare at each other, blue to auburn.

No more words were exchanged about Will Graham that night.

Will's thanksgiving is spent alone with his dogs. Sharing the same meal as one another. He is happy.

One eats alone, the other surrounded by love.

They understand each other.

Will doesn't remember much of the next few days, except popping Tylenols and waking up in more feverish delirium. A need to hunt urges closer.

Shenandoah National Park, Virginia December 4th, 2013

Vince Guaraldi Trio’s ‘Christmas Time is Here' plays softly as Will strings up lights in his office, someone has to make it festive for the few stragglers who come in to scream at him. The lights were actually a gift from Beverly, left on his desk next to a note reading “Christmas scrooge.” Beverly had mentioned once that she's very adamant about celebrating Christmas early, Will had said he didn't care. Now he has a new burden of becoming… jolly. Matter of fact, Will decides to call Beverly,

“What's up Graham-Cracker. Did I ever thank Barney for saying that nickname? I probably should.” Her voice is raspy and sweet, instantly bringing a smile to Will’s face. He slides the phone to rest between his shoulder and right ear.

“I possibly got asked on a date.” He sets the phone down and puts it on speaker, starting to unwrap a second set of lights.

“Shut the fuck up.”

He takes it off speaker.

“Will you-” Will sighs, a strand got caught on his stapler. He has some plaid cloth to cover his desk somewhere in the storage closet,

“Hannibal. Fucking. Lecter.” comes a staticy answer, given the small speakers.

“I never said it was him.” Will shrugs, he can hear Beverly laugh,

“Like you would say yes to anyone else- wait is it actually him?”

Will smiles and details exactly what went down (omitting the phone sex, though he's sure she'd have a field day with that one…)

“Whatever you desire? What the fuck does that mean?” Will clicks his tongue, tracing the sharpness of his jaw. He wonders too.

“Well,” Beverly begins again, “Since you ‘desire’ it to be a date, then act like it, Graham-Cracker. I’m talking about the whole shebang. Get your finest suit, get a fucking haircut-”

Ouch.

“Shave your beard- I hear you groaning- it’s for one night. It will grow.”

“I don't have a suit- Well I do- but not a real nice one. Unless I wear my ranger attire-”

“Will if you show up in that fucking Ike jacket I will kill you. I know how to hide a body-”

“The Ike jacket is for fall, we have a parka at the moment. And we do have formal attire. It's for celebratory times, like the opening of a new area of the park… or other big things.” He's not really selling the suit here, is he?

Beverly scoffs, “You are not wearing the suit you're gonna wear for Barney's retirement.”

“Touche.” Will finishes wrapping the lights, standing back with a soft, pleased smile. His desk looks more festive. Contrast to the coldness of the outside, it's warm and inviting. A framed photo of all the rangers rests above his old computer, Will with a giant grin and his eyes red in flashback. His arms are wrapped around Barney and their now retired manager Harold. It glows orange in the light.

Barney used to complain about the warm light bulbs they use, but Will told him it reminded him of Louisiana, of fishing, of Cleetus, of his dad. Barney changed the white light of the break room into a warm orange.

“Here, meet me at Alessio’s suit exchange. It's near Gamma’s, near West Village and that one Ski resort.” Will hums, runs a finger through his hair.

“What day?”

“Today. At five.” He's off at three today, so it's doable. He makes an exaggerated sigh before agreeing to meet Beverly there.

In the meantime he tries to remember if he got rid of the shoes he wore for Barney's wedding reception.

Alessio's Suit Exchange, December 4th, 2013 5:24pm

The suit shop was quaint, with a woody interior that smelled faintly of leather and wax. Suits lined up in rows, and a hidden section in the back where modifications were made. The owner was an old man, small and stout with silver hair, who was currently measuring Will's inseam as he stood on a raised pedestal, surrounded by three mirrors. Beverly was examining the scene.

“Pretty close to standard, any specific styles?” the old man said, raising his head from where he crouched. Will had seen a dark blue suit that looked to be pleasant enough, but the price tag scared him off for good.

It was Beverly who returned to them with a forest green suit in hand, single breasted and made of a more muted fabric, almost canvas. It seemed soft, vintage, and elegant.

“I’m just saying, if you want to go the Park Ranger way we can always opt for…” Beverly motions to the deep green suit.

“Could pair it with a brown gingham dress shirt… brown tie. Bit professor looking, but for what was it- opera?-oh then no. Black suit and tie only,” the owner supplies, hastily reaching back for his clipboard.

Beverly whistles, “Professor Graham, I like it. Guess that dream will have to wait.” Will smiles, and steadies himself as the owner- Alessio?- is measuring his shoulders.

“You know I could've been at Quantico. If I took up Jack's offer.” Though he says it as a joke, a faint trace of pain runs through him

A failed protege

“I remember that,” Beverly offers a reassuring smile, sensing Will's sadness, “I'd kill for the job you have now, to be surrounded by nature. You don’t understand how lucky you are.”

“I was a homicide detective, I know how hard it is.” Will consoles, hoping Beverly knows he too has seen death.

Beverly hums, playing with the hem of her shirt, “and now you get to help humanity without losing your sanity. Forests are essential to our way of life, and you work for them. Now what about that black, James Bond?” Will almost confesses about his slipping sanity, but he doesn’t know if he should admit that and be pulled off the case somehow.

In the end, Will walked out with his more mature black tuxedo- more suitable for the opera- and left behind the dark green suit he had grown to like.

Baltimore, Maryland, December 12th, 2013 5:30pm

Hannibal's house. Not too long ago he was there once, having a private dinner behind closed doors. That doesn't make it any less scary. It loomed over him, making each step to the front door heavier and heavier. He starts regretting everything from his hair choice to- oh god he came empty handed. And Beverly by some miracle convinced him a bow-tie was a great addition instead of a tie. “You’ll stick out!” She had said. Will liked blending in, most days.

Will had shaved his face, as Beverly said. And his skin was now smooth and showcased his angular shaped jaw. When he re-wiped the fogged over mirror he hadn't hated what stared back at him, though it took away some of his age, it gave him a clean, sharp look. He looked like he belonged in an opera house, even more so when he combed his hair and even shaped some of his curls.

The suit came ready by the tenth, he had picked it up after work. Alessio had revealed that business was slower in the Winter, so he got it done quicker than expected. It was quality craftsmanship, and at a fair price. A bit low, in fact, even for Will Graham. It made him look like a black cat, subtle yet so elegant.

He was supposed to put on his aftershave as well, but in remembrance of his dinner with Hannibal, he omitted it.

Just as he rings the doorbell he remembers he forgot to put on any cologne, but it's too late and he's face to face with the doctor.

“Will,” Hannnial gives him a once over, himself dressed in a… exuberant black and white tux.

“Appears great minds think alike huh.” Will jokes, instantly cringing and wanting to die.

Hannibal seems ever so pleased, “I must say, the change in aftershave is quite the pleasant surprise.”

It was more than a pleasant surprise, Will smelled like pine, oak, a deep woody scent. He smelt like the day they met, his natural musk something Hannibal chased with each winter. Nothing came close to how it truly was. Will’s natural scent was woody, as for the honey-like scent Hannibal still had to figure out.

“I’m actually not wearing anything,” Will awkwardly admits, giving a breathless laugh, though with how proper he looks he doesn't come across as shy. He looks… dominant.

As for Will, Hannibal is bewildered. His skin smooth, his natural scent. It's like looking at a physical memory. Though aged, Will is almost the same as when they first met. This might be the only emotion Hannibal is forced to feel. If Will Graham could even be an emotion.

“Allow me to lock up and we shall be on our way.”

“Didn't take you as someone who would own a Bentley,” Will confesses, touching the cream colored leather armrest with his left hand, feeling the texture of each slightly raised spot.

“2003 Bentley Arnage T. I found it to be suitable for my needs.” Will leans away, facing the window and allowing the coldness of it to radiate off his cheek. No matter how high the heater is put on, you can't escape the cold.

“And I have my old chevy.”

“That is a priceless car. It carries memories. Fond memories. I will say again it is a miracle it still runs. Though I am certain many say that.” Will offers a half smile.

But he is right, it is a priceless car. He wouldn't trade it for anything.

“I must say, Will, the suit fits you nicely.” Hannibal peers into the rear-view mirror, before switching to the right lane. About twenty minutes out.

Will blushes, examining the fabric of his own suit, “Thanks. Had it tailored.”

“It forms to your body well, truly great craftsmanship.”

“Thank you.” Will doesn't know what to say and his blush deepens, no longer hidden by his beard, “I would say the same but every one of your suits seems to be altered. The change of patterns is nice though.” Hannibal looks directly at Will.

“You don't like my suits?”

“Oh no-” Will panics, whipping his head, “They're lovely. Very… intricate,” Will settles deeper into his seat, “Something only you can pull off.”

“I like my suits to be like art, expressive." Hannibal smiles. They're turning into the area now, Will senses it from the slowing of the Bentley the night has just begun.

Baltimore, Maryland, December 12th, 2013 6:14pm

The opera house was, as Will expected. Extravagant. Tall pillars, marbled and hardwood floors. Beautiful creme walls and bustling with people dressed kin to the Met Gala. At least the women were, with floor length gowns and exuberant flowing fabric. The men, as mentioned, were following the trend of black and white suits. Some didn’t, though, and Will realized they did stick out like a sore thumb. A pudgy man seemed to be looking at them, in a tan suit. Had he been in black Will wouldn’t have noticed him.

The whole ordeal was overwhelming. He felt he didn't belong, yet at the same time excitement rang through him. He never experienced something like this. Hannibal seemed to sense his timidness, and applied a gentle hand to his lower back, warmth pressed against the fabric. Will found it very pleasant, a hidden intimacy.

When Hannibal had walked in, nudging Will forward and keeping him close with the hand on his back, a few people had come up to talk to him. Not Will, but they exchanged a curt nod. Hannibal didn’t introduce them, but pulled Will closer. While they talked about art, Will merely let himself enjoy the older man’s presence and lost himself in the words of the conversation. He was beginning to understand just how popular Hannibal is. It gave him a hint of jealousy, Will didn’t want to admit it but he preferred Hannibal for just himself.

“Will, why don't you get a drink? I have a few colleagues that will pester us all night if I do not greet them," Hannibal requests, startling Will from where he stood observing the way the low lights reflected off the marble floors. “The show doesn't start till seven, so I will meet you before then.” Will agrees and begins to make his way to a smaller room where a wooden, vintage-almost rustic bar- resides, dark pine wood and bustling with more people. A few people stare, and Will assumes it's because he was just next to Hannibal a second ago.

The bartender gets him a scotch, something he rarely drinks but decides to do it this once. The orange lights of the room make Will feel cozy, add that with the warm buzz of the alcohol and you have the recipe for comfort. Except maybe his shoes. He began to wonder why hadn’t Hannibal introduced them, and worries it has something to do with himself. Ashamed?

“Excuse me! Hello- um excuse me!” Will feels someone pushing against his back from where it faced away from the bar counter. When he turns he's greeted by a short man, a round man, with a full beard and so much pomade in his hair it shined. The tan suit guy.

“Hi, sorry,” the short man breathes, “I couldn't help but notice you walked in with Hannibal- sorry, Doctor lecter. Are you one of his patients?”

Will looks confound, who was this guy and why is he asking this. “I don’t think that’s something I have to tell you…” Will diffuses, the guy seemed… a bit too excited. Its giving him the heebie jeebies.

“Oh! Sorry! Let me introduce myself. Silly me being rude to Hannibal’s well, thought out company. Franklyn Froideveaux. I’m one of Hannibal’s patients,” he reaches out for a handshake and Will obliges.

“Will.” He supplies. The use of Hannibal’s first name throws him off, especially if it’s a patient-doctor relationship. He leans against the counter, trying not to frown in confusion.

“It's just, I never see you! So I was curious.” Franklyn continues.

See him? Why would this guy- Franklyn- see any of the other patients exit beside the one before or after him. Will decides not to ask.

“We meet at 7:30.” Franklyn throws his eyebrows up, quirking one in stark confusion. Unlike Will he doesnt hide his puzzlement,

“Hannibal’s office isn’t open that late…” he gives Will an inquisitive smile, bordering on interrogation.

Will answers defensively, “I didn’t say I was his patient,” growing more offended. Franklyn tries to say something but suddenly stops.

Hannibal had suddenly appeared, quiet as a mouse. His shadow covered Franklyn, creating an eerie presence. “Hello Franklyn. Nice to see you here, I see you have met my date.” Hannibal's right arm slides around Will's shoulder, giving a firm squeeze. He turns to Will, offering a sharp smile. Will feels lightheaded, his face surprised yet fond.

“Date…. Oh yes, yes he seems very lovely. I was just asking if he was a patient of yours,” he grins to Hannibal, seemingly all attention diverted to him, “I saw you at a cheese shop the other day. I didn’t know we shared such fondness for the same things.” What the hell is this guy on? Will turns to see Hannibal’s own eyebrows raised, sharp eyes open.

“You have mentioned that before.” Hannibal awkwardly says.

“Did you come here alone?” Will asks, surely there is no possible way this man has a date right? He watches Franklyn nod his head.

“I was supposed to come with my friend Tobias, but he fell suddenly ill…” there's a painful silence, and Will clears his throat.

‘Go figure, no date. Couldn't possibly think as to why.’ Will thinks to himself.

“I hope he recovers,” Hannibal politely replies.

“Oh don’t worry, we’ll talk about that next time,” Franklyn jokes, cackling before suddenly shifting to heavy focus, “where are you guys sitting? I’ll join you!”

Hell no.

“I think it’s assigned seating,” Will says, Hannibal smiles.

“No no don’t worry, I’m sure they won’t mind.” His grin is stretched, and it's really unsettling. Will prefers doing paperwork over… this.

“I am sorry Franklyn, but you need to practice your boundaries. Remember? I know it takes time, I will see you soon.” Hannibal turns away quickly with Will, lowering his arm but still holding him. Thank goodness they got away from this creepy sweaty man. Will will ask Hannibal about this later, because there is no way he himself would keep the guy as his patient.

“Isn’t that a HIPAA violation? Saying what you practice with him?” Will teases, pressing himself further into Hannibal. People stare.

“Perhaps,” they make their way into the main concert hall, going further down the red aisles before walking through the seats to sit around the middle.

When the show starts, the lights are dimmed and the cluttered voices stop in waves. Will had asked prior what the show was, and Hannibal had leaned in close to him and told him La bohéme. Will still had no idea what this entailed, but settled into his seat feeling contempt.

Act one was interesting. A seeming story of sadness, disparity, and desperation. Poverty stricken men. Hannibal's eyes never left the stage, his pupils tracking every movement. He looked at home.

Intermission was spent in the bathroom for Will. And Hannibal fighting off Franklyn once more.

By the final Act Will had fallen asleep, resting his head into the crescent of Hannibal's shoulder and neck. Hannibal breathed into his curls, enjoying the warmth and vulnerability of Will.

Will awoke by the end, and saw Hannibal's eyes water as the character Mimi perished. Will didn't bother to watch the performance, focusing his blue eyes on the man beside him. A single tear fell down his sharp cheekbone. Pure enjoyment, blissful and unfiltered. Will’s eyes threatened to water yet not from the music. It was because for the first time since he was in his marsh, he felt love.

On the way out Will struggles to take off the bowtie that was constricting him. Hannibal, seeing his struggle, reaches over and rips it off of him in one swift movement. Confused as to why a psychiatrist has strength like that, Will rubs his neck and can only stare. He'd rather die than admit that was the hottest thing he's experienced in a minute. Then he remembers their call.

Will is woozy as he gets to the car.

The car ride home was quieter than the first, only the forest half was filled with conversation about the performance itself. Will had liked it, and apologized for falling asleep. Hannibal told him he needs his rest, he knows it's hard to come by these days.

"I apologize about Franklyn. He is a patient of mine who seems to have taken a… interest in me." Will barks a laugh, one he was holding in during their conversation.

"The dude is really weird. He seems to be stalking you- kidding of course. What was that cheese thing?"

Hannibal sighs, looking dreary, "I fear you might be correct. I plan to drop him as a patient soon, I cannot have him getting involved in my personal time." Hannibal side eyes Will, "Especially not now."

"That's probably a good idea," Will agrees. Hannibal hums in acknowledgement.

"Why didn't you introduce me?" Will asks abruptly. The night sky flies by them quickly, snowy treelines blending into a large mass of black. Hannibal quietly faces him, before turning his eyes back to the road. His hair is slightly mused, very appealing to Will when he sees him less put together.

"They're not worthy of knowing you." Will squints, looking puzzled.

"What do you mean worthy?"

Hannibal glances at him, "Just as I said."

There's more silence, and Will begins to play around with the bow tie in his hands, tracing the edge of the satin.

"You are a very unique man, Will. Someone I hold very dear to me. They are not people of importance, you are." Will kind of understands.

"I don't get how I'm so important I superimpose others?"

"I would do anything for you." Hannibal admits, it throws Will off guard. He continues to stare at Hannibal, before facing back to the front window, watching the road travel forward. All these confessions are making Will slightly giddy. It's hard to understand, but it feels ethereal to have this effect on Hannibal. But anything?

Will thinks about The Ripper, who's been calling out to him- at least he wishes. Would Hannibal do the same? Would he kill and create for him? Will he use flesh and blood to profess his love? To satiate the ache?

“Would you kill for me?” The words taste bitter, but they feel soothing in Will's mind. It extinguishes Will's own burn, one he chooses to ignore.

Hannibal peers over to Will, sliding his right arm over to Will’s side, his hand pressing deep into Will's thigh. Will sucks in a breath, looking at Hannibal's knuckles curl into his muscle.

Hannibal pulls away, both hands now on the steering wheel as he continues driving. Will has his answer. At least he will soon.

At Hannibal's house, Will gets in his truck and drives home after saying goodbyes. His heart feels light, and the ache that envelops his mind is at rest till he gets home.

The insomnia doesn't get better, but his dreams do.

Wolf Trap, Virginia December 5th, 2013

Will receives a call early that morning. It rings through the morning air, and for some peculiar reason, a sense of dread fills him as he reaches over for the smartphone. It's Jack. His stomach sinks, it's never good news with Jack.

A third body was found.

Shenandoah National Park, Virginia December 5th, 2013

“His bloodhounds were collected by agents this morning, you think we can adopt them after?” Beverly asks joyfully over a to-go coffee, the warmth of the steam on her breath forming a large cloud over Pierce.

“Sure Bevs, I bet you should ask Crawford now. He'll definitely like that.” Beverly rolls her eyes, before walking back to the car.

The body is located at a lookout, just west of one of the Falls. It was found by some hikers, and reported at 8:00 this morning. Will has yet to see the body, but can already tell it's a big one based on all the people around, buzzing by with various equipment. Barney's down at the entrance, patrolling, Will gets to be Jack's own bloodhound once more.

"C'mon Will," Jack commands, Will follows swiftly, crunching their boots as they dodge blood work specialists and random field agents. It's busy, hard for Will to do his thing.

"Oh." Is all Will says. The body, stripped naked, is laid out supine, hands positioned to hold open his chest. Inside are an arrangement of flowers, notable green carnations, magnolia- and a new addition. Hydrangeas. "Seems to be quite the florist" Jack jokes, Will silently nods.

As Will peers deeper into the display, he notices an object at the heart of the colorful bouquet. It's a fishing lure. A green lure.

It's appalling how instead of a pit of despair forming, Will feels elated, a buzz of jubilance at his one hope: It could be for him. Fishing lures, what he makes- it's-

He knows that lure. His blood runs cold, as if the snow around them somehow got into his clothes.

A piece lost to time; His lucky lure.

He squats closer, trying not to disrupt the body. All noises surrounding him seem to disappear magically, this one artifact demands all of his attention. His carved lure, faded from its old green.

That summer day nineteen years ago. A final goodbye. He kept it.

Now nausea forms, a sense of betrayal. And still, love. He turns his head back to face Jack, Who is watching him work over his own cup of coffee.

"I need to go see Hannibal."

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

sorry if there is small mistakes I tried my best. I will reread again (for the 20th time) soon :((((((

The door swings open with much ferocity, so much so that a book falls down from the shelf it had been stored on— and spills onto the deep mahogany floor of Lecter's office. The pages of nonsense words from old philosophers now press against wood grain in reign of the calamity that is about to be summoned in the room.

When the door finally teeters back into a soft swing, it reveals the bewildered blue eyes of Will, with his hair astray– as though he was combing it in stress– and his knuckles red from the cold for he had no time to put on his gloves, leaving them cracked and blistered. His is short-winded, expelling air with a deep primal seeth– but he is trying to restrain it as best he could. For he is man not beast.

Hannibal is standing, already expecting his visitor– in fact, he's been expecting Will since he left the body. Knowing eventually Jack will want his bloodhound on the case, and fast, Hannibal did not expect any delays to his confrontation. His own stance is not one of fear– neither one of challenge; merely indifference– but on the inside he welcomed it all. He knew he was to stand trial in the case of morality in Will's mind.

Their eyes meet, a blue cutting glare shining off of deep auburn. Behind Will's eyes there's fear– in front, anger. More than anger. Rage. Will was never a spry man, but now his body was ignited in so much life it was uncanny, just how much this vexation fueled him.

"Will," Hannibal begins smoothly, much to Will's own hatred, his stupid accent making him sound ever the more condescending, " what can I do for you?"

The ranger's dark brown eyebrows shoot up in disbelief, his jaw slacked in what can only be described as astonishment. Just as quickly as it shows, it fades into a dark casting glare. He takes a step closer, leaving drops of water from the melted snow that clings to his ranger uniform to seep into the floor. The light from the hallway behind illuminates these puddles, making Hannibal tick in annoyance at the mud that came through.

“I am no fool, Dr. Lecter– unfortunate as it is, I've been acting as one,” Will spits, his voice so aggressive it's foreign in his ears. Hannibal’s eyes spark up in appeasement.

The older man shifts in his place, the shadows formed from the folds of his gray suit shift and dance as he moves his own body closer and he circles around Will till it is Hannibal who stands in front of the door– trapping Will into the room. If it ends badly, the ranger does not have an escape. Will takes a notice of this– but does not act on it. He is not scared of Lecter, never had been. To be true– this position they stand– Will so easily able to corner Hannibal into the wall – makes two new questions painfully aware in Will's mind; so aware it causes him to physically scowl– the only proof of his existence.

Does he have the power to Kill?

Yes.

Does he have the want?

...

“You are acting hysterically. Why don't you sit-” Hannibal's disingenuous oblivion riles up Will and forces him to be direct and upfront. Sometimes it is for the better, for he was in no mood to play their mind games. He clicks his tongue, his voice somehow steady.

“It’s you.”

The room stalls, only the sound of their breathing and the rustling of Will’s banks as he sways his balance from left to right. Hannibal's eye twitches, the only sign he has even heard Will.

Will’s heart is stammering, apprehensive at Lecter’s silence. He always hated those extended periods between words for it opens up self doubt– resulting in questions that sound unsure.

“Is it you? Who’s been calling out to me?” His voice is cordial in spite of it all.

Providing the room for doubt did take away some of the leverage Will had in this confrontation, but it makes the other man speak so Will does not take it as a loss.

“Calling out to what, Will?” Another evasion. Now it is ridiculous. Will gives a deep breath, his heart is pounding. He can feel the warmth of the earth– it's making the anger rise up once again.

“The lure. The– the one from Louisiana. All those years ago, when we fished. You gave me that art I gave you my lure. It’s you”

Hannibal does not move a muscle, with a quirked brow. Will breathes as slowly as he can— observing his face. He’s interrogated many people, so he’s familiar with facial expressions, but this gets lost on Hannibal. He waits, for a sign, for anything.

Hannibal’s eyes squint ever so slightly, a millisecond and it passes. Will, tired of the silent treatment, relaxes his body and trudges for the seats that appear to have moved closer to one another. He sits down calmly, gesturing for Hannibal to do the same.

When Hannibal quietly sits down, crossing his legs over one another and listening intently, Will begins to speak.

“I don't even know how it took me so long, the clues were right there. The magnolia– Fucking hell its the Louisiana state flower– the fact they were all those harming animals– I mean come on you took my words and made them physical. It was my own foolish morality that blinded me from the truth.”

“Morality is a strong force, it is what governs our actions. Whole religions are built on the basis of morality. Perhaps it is the other way, morality is built on the basis of religion…”

Will shakes his head with an eye roll, swiftly getting up just as quickly as he was sitting and pacing his way to the ladder that juts out of one of Hannibal's book shelves– so extravagant it might as well be a book wall. Hannibal follows suit, as if Will has a leash on him.

They stand no more than a foot apart, Will facing the ladder and Hannibal facing him.

“So it is true? I know the answer, but I need to hear you say it.” Will whispers, the desperation he came in with now reveals itself once more.

“You may think what you want to think, Will, in hopes it will sooth your mind.”

Hannibal expected anger, but was a tad alarmed when Will whipped around and surged forward, grabbing the lapels of Hannibal’s suit and shoving him with a hard rattle into the same ladder he was just staring at.

Will grunts as he presses against him— debating whether to punch Hannibal or acknowledge the way his body reacts to the closeness. It’s confusing for Will, but the desperation—

puzzlement for all this drives Will to act on his anger.

He firmly grasps Hannibal’s collar, watching Hannibal's calm eyes look down to where Will's hands are. Will’s heels dig into the ground, pushing even closer so their noses almost touch. His heart is stammering— questions are swarming– he's tired of Hannibal toying around with him.

“Why Hannibal, why?” His whisper yells with deep despair, “All those nights of torment— why this? You watched me bumble about like an idiot thinking I was— helping society— only for it to be YOU . ”

Hannibal’s lips quirk up, groaning when it causes Will to wrap his right hand around his neck. Hannibal’s hands reach back and grip against the wooden footholds. He looks down and to the left, his light lashes covering his auburn eyes. Submission.

“Why else would I, Will? Is this not what you wanted? I honored you, gave you the righteousness you seek.”

“You took something beautiful– something that *was* righteous and made it sick and perverted.” Will sneers behind his teeth. Half of him knows it’s a lie, the other yearns to know if it’s the truth.

Just then Hannibal’s face flashes into disgust, the most emotion shown through this whole ordeal. His hands grab Will's wrist, stunning Will with the sudden movement and with sheer strength he separates Will's hands from his throat. In a flash he digs his arm into the side of Will, before spinning him around so the roles are reversed and he shoves Will even past the ladder, so he is pressed against the bookshelf itself. Will fights back to no avail, Hannibal’s right thigh slams into Will's knee, forcing the younger man to spread his legs and grunt in pain. The pressure of them is intense, each one pushing against the other like magnets that face the wrong way.

“You know that is a lie, only uttered so you can still play the role of a moral man. It is what you wanted Will, you have said it yourself. You wished to be yearned like this— and now you are.”

Will groans, tears pricking his eyes from the intensity of it all. Hannibal's voice is muffled by his own heartbeat which can be felt from every inch in his body. Hannibal's hands are strong, now so jarring to know why. The hands of a killer pin Will in place by his shoulders.

Will whines— he doesn't know if it's from the pain or from the warmth that surges— the shame of his words.

"I didn't ask for you to kill. I knew— deep down it was you. I knew."

"You wished it was me."

Will screws his eyes shut, face flushing in anger and shame.

"I prayed it was you. I wanted it to be you."

"And now that it is, you reject it." Will takes a ragged breath, matching Hannibal to his panting. Will grabs Hannibal's wrist, alleviating some of the pressure in his shoulders. He stares into Hannibal's eyes. There is hurt behind them. Somehow he upset him.

"I never said that," comes Will's voice strangled. Lecter presses in further, resting his forehead on the door so his mouth can be pressed close to him. He takes a sharp breath— about to whisper something, and then jerks back, tearing his right hand away from Will so he may grasp Will's jaw and snap his face to his.

"Do you accept me, Will? For all I am. For all I do. In sickness and in health?" There's a tinge of desperation in Hannibal's voice, it makes Will's stomach jump.

He looks into the eyes of the killer— feral and primal— almost red in the lighting of the room.

"What do you do with the organs? The ones that were missing from the body, you're too meticulous– it has meaning, design what is it–" Will asks, eyes widening slowly at the unforeseen possibility that it could–

“I eat them.”

Will blinks his eyes closed, hanging his head low so he speaks into his chest, “Oh my god.”

Hannibal gives him a few seconds to process, lessening the vice of his grip. Will takes a shuddering breath, noting the warmth of tears that begin to run down his face. His body begins to feel lighter, his throat painful.

Will allows Hannibal to pull closer, all inertia dissipated and movements so tender. Hannibal's forehead touches Wills, his right hand letting go of its grip so it may tilt Will’s chin up. Hannibal’s breath can be felt on Will’s lips,

“Will you show me you're mine? Show me you are my equal.”

He pulls back, allowing Will to catch his breath as he leans back into the Books. His blue eyes are glossy in misery.

“What is it you want from me, Hannibal?”

“Accept my gift.” Will blinks away a tear, shameful for how effeminate he feels, Hannibal lets go, watching as Will slides away from him and heads to the door.

“Remember my green carnations, Will.” Hannibal says as Will opens the door to leave. Will turns his head, casting a somber look of yearn before leaving for good.

Love.

Shenandoah National Park, Virginia December 5th, 2013 6:00 pm.

“Jack?”

“Graham, I need you back at the morgue, they finally dismantled the… whatever it is. We want you to take a look at that lure that was left. It appears to be handmade, and old–”

The phone runs warm in his hand, and Jack is interrupted with a deep sigh. Will swivels back in his office chair, the phone screen sticky from the sweat gathered on his temples.

“I can’t. I can't stomach it right now. Maybe tomorrow?” He hears an aggressive laugh on the other end and a barked command.

“Why did we even get you clearance?”

Call clicked and ended abruptly, the beeps ringing out in the office. Will groans, laying his temple down onto the surface of his desk– his keyboard’s edge cutting into his forehead. He groans more, each one more pained than the last. His head is screwed shut and there's a numbing pain in the nape of his neck. He's suddenly freezing yet the sweat pours off of him.

He closes his eyes and suddenly he can't open them. It's nothing but darkness for hours, as he lays in a delirious state constantly transitioning from dreaming to not, R.E.M sleep overtaking him sometimes. Sometimes he stays still with his eyes open, not remembering those short periods. Vacant seizures, and his fever is high.

He knew the second he drove back to work– as late as it was– it wouldn't end well. With all that happened today, he should have gone home and fed the dogs.

Sometime in this psychosis, he calls Hannibal–at least he thinks he does– and is swarmed with all the need in the world.

“I'm at my office… come… come find me..”

Only it doesn't sound like that, for his mind is gone to mush and there is movement beyond the window that sits behind Will.

Shenandoah National Park, December ? ??:?? pm/am 2013

The movement entranced him to follow it. Its hoof prints in the snow beckoned him forward. With it it brought the warmth of Louisiana, the only warmth that could sooth his chills. He followed it, closer and closer. It led him past trees, foyers and foyers of sycamore, birch, ash, all useless for the fact it is all gray and blue. Only the snow illuminates the glowing path.

He follows the stag where it guides him, through twisting paths and sharp corners. It slowly evolved into a chase, where Will's fangs crave to eat and he runs after it. It tries to evade him, his tail flicking as he hops and his antlers getting caught on twigs. He's still near the office, only going down a winding path not marked on a map. The agents are damn near the other half of the park, no one will hear its cries. The stag, whining like caribou, looks back once so their eyes can meet, warm and auburn to icy blue. Will's hair sticks to his forehead, hands reaching out, trying to hold it, grasp it, have it close so he may burn.

His nose burns from the cold, and his calves ache. His lungs burn and he keeps running, hunting after it. It's finally time. He’s never wanted anything more than this, it overtakes his blood.

The stag tramples over jutted out roots, a crack in its right ankle. It cries out in pain, hollering, its breath showing in the precipitation, matching Will's own from his heaving. A single mistake will cost him his life.

A forever turning point, a flower that finally blossoms and searches for the sun.

Will reaches the stag, in a frantic frenzy he lunges for it where it lays, his fingers rubbing against the mass of fur, his hair matching the coarseness of the fur from the frozen sweat that no longer drips. He grips it tight, ripping out fur as he does so. With a yearning cry he bares his teeth down, once blunt now sharp and drawing blood. It tastes sweet, like the scent of magnolia, and the whole of the stag vibrates through him.

He begins to tear, rip out an array of flesh and guts, precious tendrils of the beautiful machine made by god. The stag's hands claw at Will's chest, scratching at his parka with useless desperation. His leg– the good one, kicks at Will's side forcing Will to crack down at the stag's head with the blunt force of his elbow. It cracks and bruises his elbow along with it. One howls in pain, the other in triumph.

Will forces his head back, biting through his throat and jaw, noting the cry that also emits– though it slowly morphs into a girl's as Will chews through his trachea and claws it open. He swallows mouthfuls of flesh and blood, the final whine of the stag making him cry out in misery.

It should have never come to this. The seed was planted years ago. To whom Will is unknown, but he eats and eats, till he begins to hurl up the blood and cartilage into a gross red puddle in the mud.

It is then when a firm hand presses against his neck, reeling him away from the body of the stag. It angers Will, to no extreme, and he begins to attack the person who yanked him away from his kill.

His fight is not much, given how weak Will has become from the ch ase. He claws and kicks at the stranger, who holds him down into the snow, now laying as if he was making snow angels. The moonlight cascades down on the stranger who hovers above him the faint scent of cologne.

"Will! Will stop!" That voice, Will knows it, his arms go weak, leaving him splayed out.

"Will." The stranger presses his forehead to Will, surely covering himself in blood, "Will. You've been killed." The voice is cumbersome, the words meaning nothing to Will. The stranger seems to notice this.

"You are sick." Is all he says, their breaths mingling together. Will's shaking hands reach out, feeling the face of the man and covering it in sticky blood.

“Hannibal.” Will attempts to say through the saliva and blood that fills his mouth, “ I did it. I caught the stag. I finally have you.”

Hannibal huffs, his features intangible, a black void. But his voice, oh his voice. The very same voice that carries Will through everything, it fills his soul.

“You always had me, Will. Look what you have become,” Just as Hannibal wanted. Perfection. Will’s eyes are now closed, only faintly registering the warmth of Hannibal's tongue, as it licks from the corner of his mouth to his jaw, collecting up the blood that stained it, rough against the stubble. Will mewls, both in pain and warmth.

“Look at the job you've left me, Will. We will have to work on your craftsmanship.” The joke is lost on vacant ears. Will lays like a stone as Hannibal moves around him. Will still hasn't opened his eyes, but can hear several thuds and shifts and cracks and mush as Hannibal moves around him. He hears grunts, more cracking, and rummaging noises.

“I do not know if this man was deserving of death, but I suppose I will have to look past this just this once.”

Hannibal pulls back, every so often this hour he would stop to check on Will, throwing his scarf over him to keep him warm, and using said scarf to clean up any blood there was. Will laid supine, open eyed and in a trance.

When he finally finished the body, unsalvageable to make anything worth viewing, was buried deep into the ground, past the parent rock and to be frozen over, not to emerge till late summer– if at all. Hannibal dug it with his own hands, noting his need to incinerate everything. He hates when his kills are messy— for he has never been messy– and the extra work needed just to cover this body will prove to be a nuisance.

With a tiredness, he walks back over to Will, kneeling down to sit beside him. Will's eyes shift over to his, glazed over yet adoring the softness of Hannibal. The older man smiles at him, a rare and reserved smile, with sadness painted clear in his eyes. Will groans, seemingly paralyzed on the ground.

“I am sorry it came to this, but it is what had to be done.” Hannibal leans closer, his strong hands brushing at Will’s cheekbone, their lips grazing each other.

Will began to shake violently, his eyes rolling into the back of his head. Strangled noises of concern pounded past strained teeth, to which were scathing onto Will’s tongue.

Working on fear and not medical expertise, Hannibal, worried Will was going to bite through his own tongue, shoved his fingers into Will's mouth, prying it open and crying as Will involuntarily chewed through his fingers, leaving deep gashes, ones needing stitches. Hannibal can endure that, but it is Will who is already battling his encephalitis and needn’t have anymore injuries. He watches him, turning his head so he does not choke on the blood.

Will’s seizure only last a few minutes, and once it's over Hannibal is quick to hoist Will up, with much strength, and trek the grown man through the trail– not a vast one, a rather light stroll from the main office that used to connect to the old fire pits that once were many years ago. Why a camper was here at this time, neither of them shall ever know. Or why he was even out in this weather, is also unknown.

Hannibal drags Will through the parking lot, laying him gently into the back of his Bentley. He fishes through Will's parka pockets to find the office keys. He heads back to Will’s office, trekking slowly towards where the videotapes for the trail cams are being run. They are all to be shown to Jack, and so he goes through them, pleasantly surprised to see not one camera captured Will's escapade.

With that, he moves to delete the security camera footage of the office, even more shocked to find that there is none.

He sighs and heads back out, making sure no droplets of blood have gotten on the office floor. Not that it would be a concern, for Jack is not smart enough to even question Will. Hannibal smiles triumphantly, heading back to his Bentley, ensuring Will is sound asleep, and taking off for Will’s house.

<u>Wolf Trap Virginia, December 6th, 3:41 am 2013.</u>

Will awakes to warm water surrounding him, and the taste of blood in his mouth, His ears ring, and someone is scrubbing his abdomen up and down with gentle care. As his vision centers in, he sees Hannibal, glowing white from the cheap light in Will's bathroom, hovered over his bathtub scrubbing over pink water. It smells horrid in the room, like a steel mill– metallic– so thick you can taste it.

Hannibal reaches under and over Will, his hands brushing the inner part of Will's thigh and making the younger man suck in a breath. He begins to drain the water, turning on the spout of the bathtub to refill with warm water once more.

Hannibal notices Will's muscles are no longer as strong. The sickness was eating away at him.

“Unfortunately it will be a bit till the water runs clear, then of course I will have to wash myself. I used one of the dog's brushes to scrub under your fingernails, I hope you do not mind. I will buy you as many as needed.”

Will stirs, leaning back and enjoying the stark contrast of the cool ceramic against the warmth of the bathwater. The sloshing of water is also soothing, and he looks down. Under normal circumstances, he would be embarrassed to be exposed to Hannibal; but now he doesn't care. He knows what happened. This time it isn’t forgotten. He remembers everything; the run, the chase.

“It wasn't a stag, was it?” he asks, not moving an inch. Hannibal resumes his scrubbing, pumping out more soap from the bottle that lays at his knees.

“No. It was not.” Will takes his gaze up Hannibal's muscular arms, looking at his hair– undone with splotches of blood, cascading down over his forehead as he leans forward more to scrub at Will. He notices that Hannibal is also bare chested, and when he uses all his strength to peer over, he quickly sits back down with a splash, his face burning in embarrassment.

Hannibal, unfazed, simply glances at him and resumes scrubbing, now moving onto his hair.

“I had to get rid of the clothes. I put them outside. I will incinerate them after our bath. Fortunately this proves the job to be far less tedious now that we do not have soiled clothes in your home. And it was the more polite thing to do.”

Will laughs, breathless and weak. He rubs his face, noting his fingertips are wrinkled. He's been in here a while.

“You could’ve worn a towel. I don't want you to be cold.” Hannibal shakes his head, motioning Will to lean forward so he may rinse out his hair.

“Nonsense, I do not want to make more of a mess than there already is, especially since you will be taken to the hospital soon enough.” To that Will scrunches his nose, pushing away Hannibal's hands and blinking away the soapy water in his eyes.

“Hospital?”

“Yes,” Hannibal pushes Will’s head down more forcefully, “You suffered a mild seizure. You may have not noticed but you have a lisp for you bit through your tongue. I… tried my best to prevent any more harm.”

Will looks at the hands that wash them with more care. Hannibal's left hand reveals deep teeth marks, red and to the bone with small dangly cuts of flesh.

“Jesus,” Will reaches to hold his hand, gently holding it. It doesn't look severe enough to bleed out, obviously, but it does appear to require stitches, “ That's gotta burn with the soap– Hannibal you–”

Hannibal huffs, removing his hand from Will's gentle embrace, noting the water has run clear. He helps Will up– with his good hand given the amount of force needed– and gestures to a towel which sits on top of the counter next to the tub. Will wraps himself, feeling like a kid who just got out of the pool. He tries not to stare at Hannibal's body, noting the insane inappropriateness of it given he had just… ate a man.

Hannibal– who does not have this moral dilemma– enjoyed every moment he spent washing Will's body, and did not shy away from wandering eyes.

Will brushed his teeth thoroughly, flossing them as well. Hannibal made him rinse with peroxide, and sent him away to warm himself.

Will sat at the edge of his bed– his actual bed and not the nest he formed in his downstairs couch– and waited for Lecter to finish his own scrubbing. He dressed himself– in a simple sweater and trousers, and tried not to let the worry of what he had done eat away at him.

When Hannibal finally came in, he borrowed some of Will’s clothes, noting them to be a bit short on his legs, giving him high-waters, and sat down next to Will.

“Will I be caught?”

“It is possible, but a slim chance. There was no evidence of the crime– save for the blood. There's a storm coming, so it should not matter too much. I will deep clean my Bentley– here– and I will mop your house as you sleep. Just tell me where everything is and I will take care of you– and it all. Next time, you will be more careful, and sound in mind.”

Will nodded slowly, feeling like a little kid, acknowledging the next time and not feeling as much resentment as he would feel had it been said just a few hours ago. In fact, he didn't feel much guilt at all. He knew the weight of his actions, but for some reason it never quite struck him as horrendous. Instead it felt more like he bumped his car on the way out of a parking lot, after a long day of practicing driving. A minor mistake.

Sleep inevitably took over Will, while Hannibal moved diligently around the house. The dogs, remembering their old friend, followed him around as he cleaned. He even fed them, noting Will had most likely not– and tucked them into bed as best he could. Then, when the sun had begun to rise, he set fire to the clothes and buried the ashes with the tools Will had let him know were in his shed. In some lockers to the right of the shed, behind some boat motors

that are haphazardly covered with a towel, there were car cleaning supplies– which Will had a lot of in order to keep his chevy looking so nice and running so smooth.

Hannibal spent a good few hours scrubbing the inside of his Bentley furiously, till his hands itched and burned in the cold and from the chemicals. Luckily, for his hand, any blood can now be chalked up to the seizure– if anyone were to ask. There was no rousing suspicion for it to ever be called to a DNA test.

Finally, when all was said and done, Hannibal gathered up Will and drove him to Reston Hospital Center with haste. Will was still delirious, but no longer did stress wear him down. But his body failed on him, no longer with the energy to keep him awake

Reston Hospital Center, December 8th 2:25pm 2013.

“Hello Mr. Graham, so glad to see you up and at 'em!” A cheery female voice rang through, her hands tugging at the blankets that engulfed Will. His hospital gown was loose on him, and the sun poking through his window was giving him a headache.

When he moved his arm, wires came along with it, causing him to jerk and the nurse to put her hand down on his chest and keep him still.

“Morphine… it's best to keep it in now. Try not to yell or use your tongue too much– the stitches will dissolve when they're ready. Luckily the tongue is the fastest healing area on our bodies, so you shouldn't have too much trouble with it soon.”

Will duly noted all this, and tried to grasp what exactly happened after Hannibal scooped him up from his bed. He looked at the nurse, whose auburn hair was tied back and with a pink headband contrasting her blue scrubs. She noticed his look of confusion and gave the easiest explanation she could.

“Your friend brought you here, you've been in and out of sleep for two days. Encephalitis – an auto-immune one– but with anti-inflammatories and steroids you should be good to go for now. Luckily no hemorrhages, but…” She appeared grim, “The doctor told me that you may struggle with some motor skills for a bit, due to the seizures, which you seemed to be having for quite some time.”

Suddenly her pager was ringed, and some code was called through. She promises she will be back soon, and leaves Will to dwell on all of this information.

He reaches his hand out, attempting to make a fist and having to use much more effort than before. He didn't even bother trying to do anything else with his hands, and instead laid back, and enjoyed the warmth of the sun.

“Knock Knock,” came Beverly's voice, to which Will’s eyes flew open in joy. She was carrying some apple sauce, and sat at the provide chair on Will's right side which sat against the window. She was wearing a green sweater and black slacks, her hair put into a messy bun and her makeup light. Her forehead was drawn tight in worry, but she tried to cover it up with a smile. She reached her hands over to hold onto Wills, frowning at the weak grasp he gave back.

“Quite the scare you gave us, Will. We were all worried for you.” Will smiled, admiring her face, which soothed him.

“I’m okay Bevs, I’ll be better soon.” Beverly frowns, seemingly knowing something Will doesn't.

“Barney says he’s going to come visit tomorrow, he says a camper went missing in the park and there's a search party on,” Will frowns, suddenly worried. Beverly Rushes to comfort, “ Oh no no, don't worry Will. Nothing terrible. He was a runaway anyways, not really a big case… just rest for now.”

Will almost collapses in the relief her words gave. The luck, the joy, it almost makes him cry.

“Thank god Lecter was there– you even chewed through his hand. He had to get stitches.”

“God I know,” Will supplies, warming at the mention of his name. There is still harrowing guilt at the fact Hannibal is the Chesapeake ripper, but the floating feeling of love masks all of it.

Love.

Beverly leaves after laughing over applesauce with Will, occasionally stopping so the nurse can check his vitals. She reveals that Jack is considering dropping him from the case because of his health, and Will couldn't be anymore thankful.

Reston Hospital Center, December 8th 6:00 pm 2013.

Alana Bloom exits Wills room, a content smile overtaking her soft features. It is then where she sees Hannibal, dressed in his suit with a bandaged hand, coming up to Will's room. They smile at each other in greeting, Alana pulling them to the side of the hallway, where fluorescent light beats down at them.

“He said he's off the case.” Alana grins, scoping Hannibal's reaction and smiling when he sees him look pleased.

“It would be best for him. He needs to recover. I assume Jack desires me to replace Will? Or will that be you?” Alana chuckles, her blue eyes matching her blue turtleneck.

“Of course he wants you, Hannibal. You were his puppet before Will.”

“Naturally. How is Will doing?” Alana keeps her grin, but her eyes falter.

“He's fine, he's going to have to take time off work to recover, apparently his seizures damaged his motor skills…” Alana looks at Hannibal's hand, where the bandage stands out against his dark suit, “ Why were you there, Hannibal?”

“He called for me.” His facial expressions remain the same whilst she scrunches her brows.

“Are you… in love with him?”

The question is riddled with sadness, her blue eyes, so similar to Will’s yet nothing alike, seem to have a desired answer.

Hannibal only smiles, and heads into Will’s room.

“Hannibal,” Will calls, his heart swelling as the older man comes in. His white hospital gown makes him look so feeble, forcing Hannibal to truly see just how thin Will has gotten since he got sick, no longer the muscular, strong ranger he once was. Regrets begin to form as he looks over Will.

“Will. How are you doing?” Hannibal takes his seat in similar fashion to Beverly, only now the sun has gone down. Will smiles, wincing at his tongue.

“Fine, I'm off the case.” Will admits, realizing Hannibal is not shocked and probably heard it from Alana, “ Guess that means no more sessions?”

“Perhaps not in that sense, but I am sure we can keep finding reasons to see each other.” Will allows himself to bask in the warmth, in his own love. Hannibal too basks in it, of his new partner.

“So long I have waited for you, and now we are here,” Hannibal whispers, to which Will listens closely, “How are you feeling, Will?”

Will swallows dryly, thinking about it all. All his efforts– the chase– the bodies– all just to find one another.

“I wanted you. For so long Hannibal. Everything was because of you. I don't know why, it just was.”

Hannibal leans back, clasping his hands together and hunched over.

“I assume this answers the question if I would kill for you, no?”

Will dry chuckles, resting his head against the pillow. “And I kill because of you. What a pair we make.”

“Perfect complements, I dare say.” Hannibal chirps, admiring Will's face, “ only took you being sick to have your true potential.”

Will frowns, “ I wouldn't say that. I was like this before, since Lousianna. I've always had something in me, I didn't know it would morph into this.”

“But you would not have come this far if it was not for your delirium. I smelt it on you the very first time we met. It was then I realized all my efforts– the fruits if my labor– could be enjoyed. It was just the right thing to make you realize our true self– prevent your masking.”

A few silent moments passed. Vacant eyes on Will.

“What do you mean you smelt it on me?” he asks, retracting his hands to his sides, suspicion oozing from his words.

“Your sickness.” Hannibal answers nonchalantly.

“I'm aware. What do you mean the day we met?”

Hannibal frowns, “ when we met again. In my office. After that I knew everything could be put into place.”

Will remained silent, save for the occasional beeps and chirps of a hospital.

“You… knew I was sick.”

Hannibal nods. Will looks at Hannibal's hands where they bit through. He remembers the stag.

“Are you fucking joking?” Hannibal squints his eyes at Will, Will turns forward, so he may stare at the closed hospital door.

“This could have been prevented.”

Hannibal shakes his head as a teacher does when his student is wrong, “Maybe in body but not in mind. You have had these intentions since we met, I only sought to bring them forward.”

“Bring forward the parts you liked- ”

“No, the parts you denied.”

Wills breathing began to quicken, the memories of the blood in his mouth and the crunching of bone. Everything. The Stag, the hours lost, the thoughts no man should ever be forced to have.

But you liked when he killed for you, why are you disgusted now?

Because he was sick and deranged– his disorder ad sinkess– the perfect tool for Hannibal to shape him.

“What a fucking idiot I am.” Will barks, “ I ignore the signs– why wouldn't I think a man like you would do something like this? Did I really think I was an exception?” Will places his hands softly at his sides, turning his head away and closing his eyes, he's not even angry, and even begins to laugh to himself, a bewildered gaze and the hysterics of it all.

“Like some experiment.” he says more to himself, “ of course. Of course.”

“It was necessary.” Is all Hannibal supplies, for once unsure of what to do.

“Was it?” Will snaps, tears pricking at his eyes. He feels like throwing up. Of all he could accept, this? “ This is not a gift Hannibal, this is– what did you *do* to me?”

Hannibal frowns, about to retort when Will cuts him off.

“Leave,” Hannibal stays quiet and doesn't appear to be getting ready to leave. Will can't bear to see his face.

“Leave, and I don't want you to come find me. I don't want to hear of your name, of anything. I can promise you one thing, I will not turn you in… but in return you are to never call me, seek me, and preferably even think of me.”

Will can only manage to look over the side and see Hannibal’s dress shoes. His left foot tapping the floor in soft thuds. The atmosphere is both uncomfortable and tense, Hannibal smoothing his thumb over the bandages on his own hand.

Will continues, “ Jack won't suspect anything, not if I say it was too much. After Lass… and as for Beverly– well frankly none of this concerns you, this is my own mortification to go

through. Just leave. I know you wont kill me, because you trust me. So show me your ‘love’ and get the fuck out of here.”

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